Campione! Volume 1

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These are most of the novel illustrations that were included in volume 1.

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カンピオーネ! 神はまつろわず

丈月城

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草薙護堂は神殺しである。

神を殺した者は神の権能を得る。そしてその力を得た者は王者『カンピオーネ』と呼ばれ、覇者とも魔王とも称される。そんな高校生・護堂の求めるものは平穏な日々。しかし魔術師にして自称護堂の愛人・エリカがもたらすのは荒ぶる神との邂逅!? さらには、媛巫女・祐理も護堂に接近!? 新たな神話を紡ぐバトルファンタジー開幕！

愛する人は、神殺し。

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神の権能を得る者、すなわち
新たな神話を紡ぐバトルファンタジー開幕!!

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初恋マジカルブリッツ
世界でいちばん君が好き!
あすか正太 イラスト／天広直人

天使の飼い方・しつけ方
今日から始める実用イデルトレーニング
淺沼広太 イラスト／羽々キロ

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Characters Introduction
主要登場人物

草薙護堂（くさなぎごどう）

高校1年生。

軍神ウルスラグナの権能を有するカンピオーネ。

エリカ・ブランデッリ

《赤銅黒十字》の魔術師。

自称、護堂の「愛人」。

万里谷祐理（まりやゆうり）

霊視の力を持つ媛巫女。

護堂と同じ高校に通う。

アリアンナ・ハヤマ・アリアルディ

通称アンナ。エリカの部下。

草薙静花（くさなぎしずか）

護堂の妹。祐理の茶道部の後輩。

甘粕冬馬（あまかすとうま）

正史編纂委員会のエージェント。

装丁／川谷康久（川谷デザイン）

神はまつろわず

カンピオーネ！
Campione

丈月 城
Illustration シコルスキー

D スーパーダッシュ

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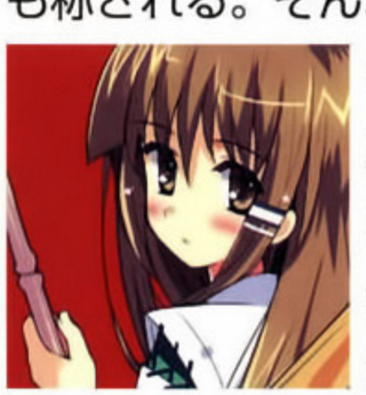

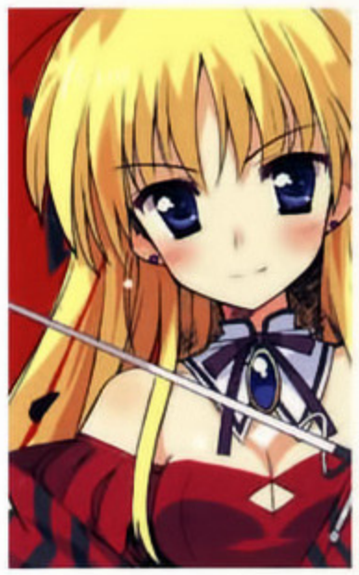

丈月 城

埼玉県出身の獅子座。
好きな言葉は「理屈と軟膏はどこにでもつく」。
甘味よりも酒、
野球よりもフットボール、
バルセロナよりもビジャレアル派。
ペンネームの由来は……
くだらないので内緒です。

シコルスキー

お風呂と猫が大好きな神奈川県民。
忙しい時は、兵糧の買出しくらいにしか出かけない
半ひきこもり生活を送ったりしています。

スーパーダッシュ文庫 丈月　城の本

カンピオーネ！ 神はまつろわず

丈月城

Illustration

シコルスキー

カンピオーネ！

神はまつろわず

Campione

？
？
？
エリカ
甘粕
アンナ
静花
護堂
祐理

燦(きら)めく。

護堂の周囲で、
黄金の小さな輝きが
天の星々のように
次々と燦めき出す。

「剣の言霊!?」

「こっちへ来て、護堂。
あなたがいるべき場所は、
いつだって
わたしの傍なんだからね」

「ふしだらな真似は
お慎み下さいませ。

――エリカさんも、
もちろん草薙さんも。
おわかりになりますよね？」

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丈月城

Illustration

シコルスキー

カンピオーネ！

神はまつろわず

Campione

Prologue

Excerpt from the Italian mage Alberto Ricardo's Book, *Demon King*, 19th Century

.....To those who accomplished this formidable feat, I grant them the title of **Campione – Godslayer –** .

Among all virtuous readers, some will probably believe that I over-exaggerate with that title and frown, while others will think that I am making undue fuss over it.

However, I want to emphasize it, once again.

Campione – Godslayer – is the supreme ruler.

Since he can kill a celestial being, he can therefore call on the highly divine powers held by the gods.

Campione – Godslayer – is a lord.

Since the power to kill a deity is in their hands, they therefore have the power to dominate the mortals on Earth.

Campione – Godslayer – is a devil.

Therefore of the entire humanity living on earth, those who have the power to oppose them do not exist!

Excerpt from the Letter of Cardinal Antonio Tebes, Addressed to the Vatican, Early 20th Century

For the purpose of going against Providence, playing with the demonic knowledge of mages, he received the title of **King** from them.

Concerning the name that you were hearing more or less.

Campione – Godslayer – is Epimetheus's[1A 1] illegitimate child. The devil.

Unfortunately, we mortals cannot fight against them.

The ones who can fight against them, are his fellow Campiones, Our Heavenly Father's angels, and the taboo pagan gods.....

Excerpt from Japanese Reports Concerning the Verification of the new Campione, Beginning of the 21st Century

In the Persian mythology, Verethragna[1A 2] was a god which had many complex attributes.

He was originally a follower of the chief god of the Indian mythology —— Mithra's[1A 3] war god, and after Zoroastrianism[1A 4] began to worship him as a war god, he had been promoted as a divine guard.

And this god had the characteristics of having ten forms.

At the beginning, his form was one of an impetuous wind, but he can also have the form of a bull, a white horse, a camel, a boar, an adolescent, a bird, a ram, a goat and a warrior with a golden sword.

Even if Verethragna continuously changed forms, he would still win, and brought victories to his worshipers —— to make it simple. After his deification, he became the symbol of what he represented, **victory**.

It was after Kusanagi Godou killed the god of victory, that he became a young Campione.

[Report on Kusanagi Godou], Compilation of the Greenwich assembly

As mentioned in the document above, Kusanagi Godou had seized the powers of Verethragna and became [The Persian Warlord]; it was deduced that he had several restrictions.

Since he cannot use this power at his own will, he is not at the level of the other Campiones, and thus does not have absolute authority.

However, everyone, please do not forget.

Even though his powers might seem to be incomplete, it cannot be denied that he is a Campione. Towards fragile humans such as mages like me, he is still a devil standing above us.

Furthermore, Kusanagi Godou, whether it's then or now, is without any knowledge of magic or spells.

This might prove the theory of the person who said thus; instead of claiming that the highest presence among the mages are the campione, it is more correct to say that in the end, mages are mere imitations of the campione.

Chapter 1 - Roman Holiday

Part 1

It was mysterious that even the hue of the sky changed subtly from country to country.

The current sky Kusanagi Godou was looking up at through the windows of the airport did not have the fuzzy depths of Japan's deep blue sky. The Latin countries' sky, as if to break through the horizons, was an amazingly bright blue one.

Turning his eyes back up front, what he saw was a crowd of different people with diverse nationalities roaming about everywhere.

It was a scene that could rarely be seen in Japan.

——Fiumicino airport.

Also called the Leonardo-da-Vinci Airport. This was the national airport of Italy's capital, Rome.

And it wasn't because of a school trip that he had come here. So at that time, Godou was the only Japanese high-school student around.

"Even though I had absolutely no intention of coming back here for another half a year..."

Godou murmured while surveying the huge traffic hurrying through the airport terminal.

After being on the shaking airplane for twelve hours, he had finally arrived in this Latin country. Because of the fatigue of sitting on a plane and the time zone difference, his body felt incredibly weak.

"This certainly isn't the first time, or the second, but that girl really doesn't care about others' circumstances."

While yawning, he tried finding a familiar face in the crowd.

The target of the search shouldn't be hard to miss.

Her bright blond hair was similar to a dazzling crown. Her beauty was far greater than any girl in Godou's memory. And on top of the fact that everyone would obviously be looking at her, having an attitude unlike anybody else——

If she was close, he would immediately recognize her.

But the one he was searching for——Erica Blandelli——didn't appear.

From people wearing business suits to rough clients carrying bags to obvious tourist groups, he was surrounded by people in all directions, but he still couldn't see Erica.

.....It was said that more or less all Italians had a bad habit of arriving long after the appointed hour.

But in Erica's case, her habit of arriving late really wasn't because of her ethnic background, but simply the result of her own laziness.

After knowing her for a few months, Godou was very sure of that.

Moreover, Erica Blandelli wasn't simply lazy. Besides being self-centered, her way of always playing others at her own convenience made her a very selfish woman.

For example, the day before when he had suddenly received this call.

"Listen, it would be very convenient if you could come to my side immediately. That's the situation, so prepare yourself to take the first flight tomorrow morning. I'll welcome you at the airport."

That had been her opening line.

It was the end of May, on a weekend afternoon. He had received the call on Friday past 4pm.

"What the heck is with 'that's the situation' that you came up with? I have no obligations to be considerate of your circumstances . Also, I have my own plans, so go find someone else."

What was she calling him for all of a sudden, that woman...

Godou replied coldly as he left school for home.

"'Because I really miss you' would be the obvious response, wouldn't it? You must also love me so much that you can't bear it, so isn't this arrangement just great?"

"No, I don't particularly miss you. Stop it with those fabrications about my feelings... Anyway, the last time I saw you was two weeks ago, not even half a month, and for two people respectively living in Tokyo and Milan, it's impossible to see each other that frequently."

He complained with as much indifference as possible.

He was already used to that woman's outrageous behavior. But he couldn't allow himself to get caught up in her pace.

"Yes yes, it's only natural after not being able to meet for half a month, poor Godou. The time spent living apart from your loved ones results in feelings of anxiety and worry, which is something I can sympathize with only too well.... Regarding this matter, since I also have some ideas to improve the situation, please stay hopeful. So about tomorrow's plans——"

Without regard to others, Erica kept going on with the conversation.

As expected of a woman with eleven years of experience in self-centered behavior, she didn't care for my circumstances at all.

"Don't say anymore, Erica, this is as far as this conversation goes . If you would care to explain everything clearly and slowly, from beginning to end, I'll listen to you, but if you don't, I'll hang up right now."

"Just what I expect of you. You rejected the invitation even though it's from me. You are the only one who wouldn't take the bait..... well, I haven't dated any guys yet, but I shouldn't be wrong."

Erica responded with her voice full of delight.

Godou couldn't help but frown, even though he knew what Erica was saying was on purpose.

Her attitude was as bad as ever..... despite knowing her demonic nature, the number of guys she had rejected had to be pretty high.

"Then I am going to say it once more. Kusanagi Godou, I hope that you will immediately come to Italy. I need your help. It will probably be difficult for me to settle this matter with my power alone, so please consider this earnestly. I, Erica Blandelli, swear upon my honor that I have not lied to you."

She suddenly got serious about it.

Furthermore, she used her 'honor'. After swearing on that, she wouldn't lie no matter what. Because to Erica Blandelli, her honor was more important than anything else.

——It can't be helped, sighed Godou.

Although Erica was indeed a capricious person, someone who wouldn't care about others' thoughts, someone who liked to play around with people and had a demonic personality, she was still a benefactor who had saved his life many times.

Since she already said that much, he had no choice but to accept it.

".....I understand. I'll do as you say, so don't forget to pick me up."

"Your answer really makes me happy, may the Lord bless your chivalrous spirit."

"So what should I do? I think you already know, but I still want to reaffirm that I won't help you do any dubious dealings."

"Of course, you only need to maintain the behavior of a king, and fight as a king. As for the rest, you can have faith in me..... though; it's great that I don't need to rely on my trump card this time. I would feel bad after using it."

"Trump card?"

After hearing Erica say such dangerous words, Godou was surprised.

"You're right, since I think that you, Godou, have the obligation to accept all my requests, don't you agree?"

"Agree or not, don't be ridiculous, why would I accept all of your requests seeing as I am just a friend....."

"——although you have already....."

Erica whispered.

It was the whisper of a devil that couldn't help but enjoy toying around with humans. Godou reflexively wanted to escape.

"Although when you have already taken my purity, you fiend. Have you forgotten our passionate night back on Sicily?"

"Th-That was something the circumstances forced on us, just the result of both of our interests. It's not like I wanted to do that....."

"Yes, that's right, desiring it from the bottom of my heart, I gave you my purity. And immediately afterwards, you suddenly became so cold towards me..... you think that there wasn't a need to feed the fish after it was hooked, didn't you?"

Although she kept complaining, Erica sounded really cheerful.

You demon! Godou silently cursed her.

"Don't say things that can be taken the wrong way so easily, it'll look as if we had some secret relationship! If others hear this, they'll surely misunderstand us!"

"But it is a secret relationship! Even afterwards, our lips met over and over again, our bodies on top of each other——"

"That's why I asked you to stop putting it so ambiguously!"

"Okay, answer me this: if I happen to tell your cute little sister about what happened between us, what do you think might happen?"

Godou realized that he had already lost.

Even though what Erica said had been heavily embellished, it was all real. And Godou didn't want the talkative Shizuka to know about it. If that happened, he'd be in deep.

At that moment, Erica was sure to be laughing near a distant sea of a foreign country.

Godou's thoughts formed a very clear image of a gorgeous girl making a self-confident smile of triumph.

"Y-You can't actually want to use this to blackmail me, can you? "

"Don't worry, if you show your sincerity, I certainly will not give your little sister any trouble. I swear upon my honor."

"Don't swear upon your honor for that! Aren't despicable affairs like blackmailing the complete opposite of honor?"

And just like that, his sudden trip to Italy came to be.

Godou, who returned home so he could prepare his luggage, opened the mailbox without hesitation.

.....Indeed, a letter had come by airmail.

The sender was Erica Blandelli.

The letter contained an airplane ticket from Narita Airport to Rome.

This letter hadn't been posted normally. He could tell because there was no stamp on it.

If it wasn't Erica's dubious [Knights corps]'s Tokyo branch that had sent this secretly, it would have been sent in a more abnormal way——it would have been something like [Magic], sent directly from Milan, Italy. There was no doubt about it.

"I'm sorry, are you....."

Godou, who couldn't find Erica and was contemplating silently, was interrupted by some Japanese words.

Not only was the pronunciation smooth, but it was also very precise.

"Black hair, black eyes, around 180cm tall; though his looks aren't bad, there are flaws so twenty points are taken off his face..... you are Kusanagi Godou-san, right?

The one who said that was a black-haired woman, around two or three years older than Godou.

"My name is Arianna Hayama Arialdi, and on Erica-sama's orders, I have come here to pick you up. Please take care of me."

"Please take care of me..... excuse me, but that insulting remark just now, that was from Erica, right?

"Yes. So it *was* you after all. Thank goodness."

Arianna-san herself didn't seem to hold any ill will.

A little more than 160 cm tall and with a warm smile, she wasn't much different from a normal Japanese girl. She was also quite lovely due to the graceful air surrounding her.

She looked so harmless that it was impossible to think she would be related to Erica in any way.

Or maybe she only looked like one who wouldn't even kill a bug from the outside, while in reality she held an unequaled strength, like a beast hiding her fangs?

"You may have guessed from my name, but my grandfather was born in Japan. That is why being of your assistance has been left to me. Please call me Anna. All of my friends do so as well."

"Then you can simply call me Godou as well. Though not all of my friends call me that, at least Erica does."

"I understand, Godou-san."

Anna showed a carefree smile.

Like a lily wavering under a light breeze, her appearance was very lovely.

Though if she called Erica with the suffix '-sama', she had to be a member of that group that couldn't recognize different eras and still claimed themselves to be mages and knights.

"You don't look like one of Erica's comrades; you're more like an ordinary person."

"......Ah, so you also think that? Since I don't have any abilities, I am still a trainee. Luckily, I have been in Erica-sama's care, and she made me a direct subordinate."

Anna-san indeed looked very young and normal. Nothing about her seemed out of the ordinary.

She said that she was still a trainee, and Godou could fully agree.

"But being her direct subordinate.....sounds pretty hard. Isn't it dangerous?"

"Ah, no, I only take care of her daily routine, so there's no danger, and Erica-sama is very strong, so she always protects me."

Taking care of the daily routine...?

Wasn't she a maid rather than a subordinate?

And Erica was also very lazy, so even the tasks that she could do surely would have been pushed onto Anna.

.....Godou started to pity this older girl.

Thinking that Anna might also be one of those who suffered under Erica, Godou thought he should be a bit more considerate to her.

"By the way, why don't I see the one who called me here?"

"Erica-sama is now attending to an important meeting. She'll get to you when she is finished, so please let me take care of you in the meanwhile."

Please let me take care of everything, said Anna. She seem quite reliable.

"Does Anna-san know what Erica wants from me? That person didn't explain anything properly and called me over. Even now, I'm still confused."

"I'm very sorry. I'm not clear about this either. I have only been told that Godou-san was Erica-sama's honored guest and that I cannot by all means neglect him....."

"So it's like this? She didn't reveal my identity to you?"

"She didn't.....maybe it's because Godou-san is someone very important? It might be why she didn't care to let me know."

"I don't think it's something important. Simply put, I am only a Japanese high school student who has been forcefully called here, so there shouldn't be any problem."

If there was something wrong, it would be the fact that it was difficult to easily explain who he really was.

But since there was no reason to proclaim it out loud, Godou didn't say anything.

"Ah, talking like this in a crowded place feels a bit uncomfortable. Let's go onto the streets. Is it the first time that Godou-san has come to Rome?"

"It isn't, but whenever Erica calls me over, I never had any time to rest regardless of where we went."

"Then this time, there should be time, I've been instructed by Erica-sama that we can walk around before she returns, so let me be your guide. The car is already prepared."

"The car, huh.....if it is that kind of luxurious BMW car with a driver, then no thanks, I can't be at ease in that sort of car,"

Whenever Erica selects a car for transport, it's almost always that kind of car.

Though, when he asked her once, she answered that she didn't have the experience of taking a bus or a tram. Anna seemed to be different than her, but.....

"I won't make it that luxurious, and I'll take care of the driving, so no worries."

To take off Godou's worries, Anna smiled and walked forth.

And what happened afterward filled Godou with admiration. For Erica to choose someone as decent as Anna-san to take care of her daily routine - it really was unbelievable!

The important part wasn't that she was meticulous, but that she was a normal person.

.....However, only later did Godou realize that he had reached this conclusion too soon.

Part 2

As the official residence of the princess of House of Savoy[1B 1] was under remodeling, the assembly was held in a spacious room in a certain hotel.

Though it was still daytime, the room's windows were tightly closed, completely blocking the view from the outside.

Around this exceptionally large table used for conferences were a total of four people, including Erica.

The first was her —— Erica Blandelli.

The sixteen year-old Erica was the youngest person here.

There were in total two old people. They are the commanders of [Old Dame] and [Female Wolf]. Especially in this country where the magic world flourishes, both were the commanders of the most powerful Knight corps.

To call them in the old way, they were the Grand Masters.[1B 2]

And the last one was a young man.

He was the young commander leading the Knight corps [Capital of Lilies][1B 3], and should be in his early thirties.

That man's position was the same as Erica's.

Just like Erica, who was representing the [Copper Black Cross][1B 4], he had won the rank of [Great Knight].

There had been thousands of mages since the ancient times.

Even though a lot of them were fakes, there were also great mages. The [Knights] who study both arts of swordsmanship and magic skills were among them. Erica's ancestors in the medieval age were the Knights Templar who worshiped Baphomet.[1B 5] In addition to being magic-users, they were also men-at-arms.

And the title of [Great Knight] could only be given to the most well-known figures amongst those warriors.

"Then everyone, it's about time to conclude this, the reason for our headaches. To whom should we give the Gorgoneion[1B 6] to take care of?"

The commander of [Old Dame] asked the question.

And it was the commander of [Female Wolf] who objected.

"Give the Gorgoneion to someone to take care of? Is that really acceptable? I think that this isn't a wise decision. Even if our leader , Lord Salvatore, isn't here, to give it to a foreign country's king, isn't it shameful? Aren't you afraid that we will become a laughing stock?"

"The ones who want to laugh can laugh all they want. What's really important is that this time it's the genuine Gorgoneion, and we don't have any kings to rely on, so it's a minor shame compared to what might happen."

"Being humiliated isn't what is most important. If it made the king angry, then what should we do? If Lord Salvatore discovers that we asked for help from other kings, then who could foresee his anger? I am really bothered by that fact."

These words weren't normally said by these elders.

But, even if their sword skills were excellent, and they aged very slowly, they still couldn't help but show their reverence towards the king.

Indeed, even the strongest knight, the most highly-ranked knight, cannot do anything to a king or a deity.

And that was the pure truth of this world.

"But will Lord Salvatore be bothered by such a small thing? In the eyes of that great person, we are only on the level of bees gathering around a beehive. If it's just bees choosing a new queen, I think he wouldn't have any problems with it."

Cutting between those two elders, was the [Capital of Lilies]'s commander.

That tall man's height was about 190cm, the bottom part of his face was covered by a beard, and although his face wasn't that bad, it gave off a somewhat gloomy feeling.

He was wearing a great tux, but it didn't really match his purple tie.

The color representing [Capital of Lilies] was purple.

One of the obligations of that group was to wear something purple.

And Erica was wearing a deep red dress with a black rose headdress on her head, which also represents the [Copper Black Cross]'s red and black.

"That being said, I really don't know which king we should ask for help. The Gorgoneion is the symbol of Mother Earth. Though it means fighting with the most ancient goddesses, Marquis Voban

would be eager to try it. So we can conclude that even if we can escape from the [Heretic Goddess], it won't be worth it if it attracts the Balkan's devil.

If that devil used his entire strength, two cities would easily be reduced to ashes.

That was because his 'power' was to break, lacerate, and crush almost all living things on Earth."

"There's another king we can ask."

At that time, when Erica thought it should be the right moment, she finally opened her mouth.

She thought it was the best opportunity to end this non-beneficial reunion.

"I heard that the United States' John Pluto Smith, who really cares about the safety of the citizens, is a hard king to have. Do you mean that we should cross the Pacific Ocean to ask him?"

The [Capital of Lilies]'s commander asked in a chattering tone.

As Erica was taking a sip of coffee, she responded with a light tone.

"No. That saint guardian of Los Angeles seems to be busy only with protecting the West Coast from the [King of Flies], so I doubt he should have any energy left to accept our request."

From the young ones' attitudes, they seemed to be more comfortable than the elders.

They weren't really underestimating the seriousness of the situation. Their haughty attitudes were from their self-confidence.

"Then you are talking about the Jiangnan's Leader Luo Hao? Or is it Cornwall's Black Prince? They are all commanding their own associations. Unless we join them, they won't help us, will they?"

"I am not talking about those two. And before you ask, it isn't Alexandria's Madame Aisha."

"Then there are none. [Kings] —— the ones who are also called Campione, there are only six in this world. We just named all of them."

The Eastern Europe's old Marquis and Southern China's martial artist, as well as the Mysterious Queen of Caves.

They were the most experienced kings, having lived over two centuries, and after that was the constantly expanding hero of the New World, as well as the wise king who controlled the British Empire, the Black Prince.

And in this century, there was also the strongest swordsman in Europe, who received the title of king.

And until now, they were all the people who were known by everyone who had the slightest inkling of the magic world.

But, in the end, there was also a king born on an island in the Pacific Ocean, and was not really known by anyone, besides a few exceptions —— for example, someone who had seen him fight with her own eyes.

Erica had a feeling of superiority, and said his name.

"No, there's still someone. Kusanagi Godou's name hasn't been mentioned yet. He is the new king, the seventh Campione, and the one I'm talking about. Since Lord Salvatore isn't here, the only one we can ask is him.

"Kusanagi Godou!"

The commander of [Female Wolf] said it in a crooning voice.

"I've heard of this name recently, the one rumored to be the Japanese who became a Campione.....but it's still unknown if it's a lie; we don't have any proof yet."

"I also read the Greenwich Parliament's report. You mean the one mentioned to have won against Verethragna, and seized his power of ten forms? .....It's indeed hard to believe."

Seeing those two elders having a negative attitude, Erica came back with a proud smile.

"Then everyone knows that report? Until now, Lord Salvatore has been absent so he can heal himself, and the one who gave him that injury is Kusanagi Godou. Indeed, on an evening half a month ago, the two kings fought against each other, and the result was a

draw. Both of them were severely injured, but fortunately, Kusanagi Godou has already healed."

"......You mean that Kusanagi Godou managed to get a draw with Lord Salvatore?"

"Impossible! Lord holds four powers; even if Kusanagi Godou is really a Campione, he should only have a single power. That overwhelming advantage makes them simply incomparable!"

Erica looked at the elders with slight disdain in her eyes.

"What are you two talking about? They are all Campiones, and upgraded to kings. The differences between fighting strength on paper, what meaning does it have?"

Hearing these words, the two elders shut their mouths with an unhappy look in their faces. The one who opened his mouth was [Capital of Lilies]'s commander.

"I have a question for you, Erica Blandelli, how can you know that those two Campiones fought each other, something that even us and the parliament doesn't know?"

The young man called [The Purple Knight] asked.

That is the title given to [Capital of Lilies]'s [Great Knight] that has passed from generation to generation.

"The reason is quite simple, it's because I witnessed that fight. I have already seen Kusanagi Godou fight, and that's why I suggested him. Kusanagi Godou, one day, will surely become

equal to Lord Salvatore and the devil Marquis Voban. To prepare ourselves for that day, I think we should build a deep relationship with him as soon as possible."

"Oh. To be regarded so highly by Erica-san, who is called the [Diavolo Rosso],[1B 7] he should be quite the amazing person. From your speech, I deduce that you have a very deep relationship with him, privately."

"Indeed, you can think of it like this. I, Erica Blandelli —— am that person's lover, and also his number one knight."

Erica said that without restraining herself and clearly declared her involvement with the other person.

And as a result, the group couldn't help but sigh.

"[Copper Black Cross] has already submitted themselves under Kusanagi Godou!"

[Female Wolf]'s commander exclaimed.

Having a [King] —— countries having a Campione are rare.

Since there were only seven of them in this world, that much was obvious.

But in Italy, there was a [King] called Salvatore Doni, and he was a young man who was a knight just a few years ago and had received the title of [King] after defeating the Celtic god Nuadha.[1B 8]

The Campiones focused on Europe as the center, and had great authority.

Whether it was people who had some connection with magic, or people influenced by them in the political and economic sectors, they had all pledged loyalty to the [Kings], and became their subjects.

They were supreme rulers and devils —— because they had unrivaled powers, a [King] could be a tyrant.

Facing that terrifying power, the number of people who worshiped and swore loyalty to them was high.

"[Copper Black Cross] is not under Kusanagi Godou. What I said was only that I, myself, became his lover, and that I take care of him..... of course, it is distinctly possible that we will pledge loyalty toward him in the future."

Facing Erica, who exposed her soft smile, the commander of [Old Dame] chuckled slightly with a snorting sound.

"So it was like this, I finally know the reason why you were sent here. Though you are a child prodigy who received the title of [Great Knight] at such an age, it is perhaps a bit soon that you are sitting at the same table as us. The only possibility —— is that you want to act as bait, and bring that young Campione here."

"I'll pretend that I didn't hear your statement, or your reputation would be damaged; probing that deeply into the relationship of two people who are in love. You'll be made fun of for that kind of action."

"Haha, that was great! As expected from a reliable fox."

The elders said these words with sarcasm.

The smiling Erica shrugged her shoulders lightly. With this debate becoming too noisy, maybe a quieter one would have been better.

"Anyways, you mean that if you are here, [Copper Black Cross] has hopes of receiving Kusanagi Godou's protection. And to gain the favor of someone like you, it means that Kusanagi Godou has

proven himself —— that is why you proposed to borrow his strength, isn't it?"

"Yes, the most important thing is that Lord Salvatore is a lord only in name. He doesn't care about anything that is not related to him. So having a good connection with another Campione isn't bad."

"But I regret to say that we have never really seen the potential of Kusanagi Godou, and to see if he really is a Campione or not, I must judge it with my own eyes."

The [Purple Knight] coldly suggested that point to Erica.

"I am sure that the [Diavolo Rosso]'s testimony is more valuable than gold. But unfortunately, I cannot entrust my fate to him just because of that."

"Of course, I thought that everyone here would say that, so let me prove it."

"How do you plan on proving that?"

The [Purple Knight] finally asked back, as Erica expected.

Believing that her plan was working as expected, a clear smile emerged on Erica's face, as fresh and beautiful as a red rose, and everyone else in the room sighed.

"Kusanagi Godou has already arrived in Rome. Tonight, everyone, please watch that man's fighting skills through your own eyes. I believe that this approach would be much more convincing than thousands of words from my mouth."

"Although you said something about fighting, who would be the opponent? Finding someone who could be a Campione's opponent isn't easy."

"The chosen one is already in front of your eyes."

Erica showed a pleased smile on her face, a gorgeous smile like the one Godou was thinking about yesterday.

"Let me, Erica Blandelli, be his opponent. Or do you, [Purple Knight], think that I, the [Copper Black Cross]' [Great Knight], who is called the [Diavolo Rosso], am not worthy to be his opponent?"

"No..... it's not like that. Indeed, you are the most appropriate person."

Fooled.

The [Purple Knight]'s face showed a forced smile, and his gloomy expression was finally gone.

"What do the elders think? To be able to witness the [King]'s fight, there isn't a better proof. If Kusanagi Godou's strength is real , I approve of Erica-san's suggestion."

The [Purple Knight] suggested to make the elders approve.

"A battle between the mysterious young Campione and the [Diavolo Rosso] —— this is indeed interesting, Erica-san. We will go according to your plan then."

Part 3

Of course, Kusanagi Godou had no idea of that. He was in a place completely unrelated to the one where the fight was being discussed.

Compared to that, he was far more occupied in shaking off death's shadow.

In those past three months, Godou experienced different kinds of dangers.

Even though it was clearly the 21st century, his life was almost taken numerous times by blades, spears, and axes. It couldn't even be counted by the fingers of a single hand. And there was even that time when he was sniped by a bolt from a crossbow.

But at least it was in the realms of human knowledge, so it was relatively easy.

He also experienced curses which would boil an ordinary human brain in a flash, or even trample the target to death by horses from the depths of hell.

But, while he should be enjoying a tour in the car of his guide, why would he experience the same things found within the driving scenes of an action movie, with the car just barely short of crashing off-road, or into a building, or down a river. It was completely beyond his expectations.

".....Could it be that Erica knows it, and specially arranged it like that."

Godou started to guess.

He thought of her characteristics, and the nickname of [Devil] which came along with her.

Yes, Arianna-san's driving skills were seriously frightening.

Could it be that Erica knew that it would be like that, so she specially gave this task to her?

"I'm sorry, I don't know how to drive very well....."

"This is the first time that I drove this kind of car, and there were also many problems when I came here....."

When Anna said that while they were walking to where the car was parked at, Godou wasn't really bothered by it.

He thought that it was just a display of modesty or such.

From the sensitivity of a Japanese, this was pretty normal.

So Godou didn't really take her words to heart, and ended up in that car.

"That car is really weird. Besides the accelerator and the brakes, there's also another pedal."

"But it's fine, I have already remembered the driving method with which I came here. Since, if the accelerator isn't stepped on with strength, the car won't work, I'll drive a little faster in a moment."

When Anna said that, Godou started to feel a bit unwell, but it was already too late.

She was already sitting on the driver's seat, and attached the safety belt.

——In less than a second, the car started and accelerated.

The car Anna drove charged into the street like a missile.

"I didn't think that, I would have a near-death experience in that kind of place....."

This was a cafe which provided food and coffee, something that could be seen everywhere in this city.

Godou just came out from the car which had lost control, and was sitting on a vine chair in front of some random cafe, tasting the particularly bitter espresso, while Anna was trying to find a place to park.

...Ten minutes before.

Anna-san was trying to use a clutch which she wasn't used to, while the car flew through the city's streets.

She said that if the accelerator wasn't pushed with strength, the car wouldn't work, so she started rolling at 80km/h with the Mercedes-Benz, and was zigzagging in between the cars before her (s-sometimes, they were cars heading in the opposite direction), until it became impossible to turn as we arrived on a congested road. As we headed into a river, Anna pressed an emergency brake, and it ended up like that.

".....Anna-san, please park the car in a nearby parking spot first; I want to rest a bit near here."

Godou said that with a tone that brooked no questions.

Leaving his own life in the hands of a rookie driver who cannot tell the difference between a manual and an automatic car was far too dangerous. What made it even scarier was the fact that the driver herself had no idea of the very thin line separating her from death.

"Eh? I thought that I should first have Godou-san visit Rome——"

"It's OK, I am already tired! I want to rest a bit!"

That was what happened.

Godou, after watching the car accelerate and move farther, entered a café and said to the Roman auntie there that he wanted an espresso.

".....Anna-san, though she looks normal from her looks, is actually someone really stupid? Just then, I almost died."

At the beginning, Godou didn't care a lot about fortune.

But through these recent times, he started to change his mind.

He thought that he was someone who is, perhaps, really unlucky.....

He never thought of himself as unlucky before. But in these past six months, the number of times he escaped death kept increasing, and he couldn't help but begin to understand those who believed in fortune.

After drinking that espresso, he felt a deeply hostile feeling.

As Godou put the glass back on the table, his eyes met with a young girl in the crowd.

The two of them looked at each other.

——Shit.

That young girl wasn't an ordinary human, and the sensation just then made him feel really bad.

Even though his body was tired from the jet lag, which left him fatigued yet relaxed, he had recovered his senses in an instant, while jitters filled him from his body to the extremity of his fingers .

When he came in contact with an enemy like her, his body naturally entered into fighting mode.

"....."

The young girl also stopped walking, and examined Godou's face; could she also see Godou as an enemy?

She was a really beautiful girl.

She was around thirteen or fourteen, and at her age, she looks like a charming and delicate little angel.

But that wasn't surprising. **They** were all not only beautiful, but possessed extraordinary bodies. Every one of them stood out.

"......I heard that there is a godslayer who calls himself a knight, and that man has cut many things with his magic sword.....is that man you?"

Before he knew it——

The young girl of a different existence had already come near him.

She had silver hair that fell on her shoulder like a moon emitting slight rays of light, and pupils as black as the deep night.

"No, the man you are talking about is injured, and has gone to the southern islands to heal himself, using the excuse of going on a vacation."

The one who injured him was Godou. However, he didn't plan on showing that one off.

"......is that so? Then you too, are a traveler."

As if her night-colored black pupils condensed, she quietly stared at Godou.

"What are you planning to do? Now, my only objective is to retrieve the [Snake], so I don't have any intention to fight. However, if you do plan on fighting, then I'll put all my efforts, and the one who loses will become the other one's servant."

"I don't know what the [Snake] is, so I don't plan on fighting either. If it's possible, I wish to maintain our relationship, I don't feel like fighting you guys."

"I understand. I'll leave quickly, but godslayer, you are lying."

"Lying?"

"Indeed, there isn't a godslayer who doesn't hold any interest in fighting me, so you're a liar."

After saying those words, the silver-haired girl left Godou.

Fuu, sighed Godou.

Luckily, it didn't end up in a fight. But even if she was a god, to call someone a liar whenever she wished was really rude.

As he was thinking that, a black-haired girl rushed to his side.

"I'm sorry, Godou-san, letting you wait so long."

That person was Anna. As she walked towards the table, Godou asked her.

"Can I borrow your cellphone? I need to contact Erica."

"It's fine, but maybe the meeting hasn't finished yet?"

After saying that, Anna lent her cellphone to Godou.

"Arianna, what is it?"

After calling her numerous times, the other side finally took the phone. It was Erica's voice, which he hasn't heard since yesterday.

"It's me. I need to ask you something."

"So you have arrived, how is it? Do you get along with Arianna?"

"Concerning that, I have many things to complain about, but let's talk about this later. Is it because I need to fight a god that you called me here?"

"About that, I'm still not sure, though the possibility is high.....is it possible that you encountered one?"

"Indeed, just now, there was a goddess."

"Is that so.....then we need to move quickly. Let's meet up now. We need to prepare ourselves for the fight tonight——"

"......What did you say?"

Godou just heard some words that he couldn't ignore, and asked again.

"I said that, tonight, you will fight me.....I think you know even without me telling you that it cannot be cancelled, so prepare yourself."

"What are the reasons that made you take that decision....."

Fate was like rolling dice; there was always something new happening (even if he didn't want that). Just then, Godou finally felt that his own fate wasn't normal.

The time is past 9:00 PM——

Godou arrived with Anna in a high-class Italian restaurant.

Maybe this was also quite famous in Japan, but Godou didn't know about it.

When Anna took him to this hotel, all that was on Godou's mind was a 'this place is really impressive' sort of feeling.

What was most important, however, was the girl waiting there.

He thought that he couldn't enter without a proper suit and a proper tie, but that seemed to be all extra; maybe there was a close relationship between the owner and Erica.

When the two of them arrived there, Erica was already waiting for them.

"Godou, long time no see, though I really hope that I can hear you say some wonderful words for our joyful reunion, I won't expect too much, since I know perfectly well that you don't have the talent of a poet."

"If you can change that attitude of yours that says everything goes according to your plan, maybe I'll think about it."

Erica's and Godou's table was close to the window, with Anna standing respectfully beside them.

Compared to Godou, who arrived in casual clothes, Erica was wearing a bright dark red dress; the two of them seemed to not match each other.

In Erica's hair was an ornamental black rose.

Maybe it was because of her beautiful and regal appearance, but her blonde hair looked like a knight's helmet or a ruler's crown.

Erica Blandelli could even make someone as obtuse as Godou see her as a beautiful girl with overflowing charisma; so if only her attitude was better, she would be perfect. That was what he normally thought.

"Arianna, thank you for your hard work. Has there been a slight problem?"

"There was one, Erica-sama.....I felt bad that Godou-san said that he was tired, and I couldn't bring him to visit the streets of Rome."

Godou could only pretend that he didn't hear what Arianna said.

Even if he claimed there was a bit of strength remaining, it would have been sucked out by that flying car that brought him to the brink of death, so there wouldn't be any meaning to it.

"Then that's great. Godou, did Arianna assume the responsibilities of a guide well? Since I was busy and didn't have time to welcome you, I was a bit worried."

"Hn, how can I say it.....it wasn't bad."

Godou didn't see what leaked from Erica's eyes, the gleam of a child pulling a prank.

The reason she sent Anna was indeed to give him a headache.

"Is it? It's great that you haven't been disappointed, since Godou will one day become my husband, and is a genuine Campione——
"

"......Eh? Erica-sama, what did you just say?"

"I said that Godou will become my husband, and is a genuine devil."

Anna's delicate and pretty smile seems to have frozen for a moment.

Since he felt guilty for hiding that from her, Godou needed to ask Erica to correct part of what she said.

"Hey! Wait a moment! We have never arranged marriage between us!"

".....You have already taken my chastity, so you mean that you were simply toying with me? How heartless of you, I gave my body and my heart to my lover, who seems to be like that playboy in Don Juan——"

Erica deliberately chose the tone of a tragic girl.

Even though he didn't see the smile her mouth let out, he could clearly see that she was making fun of him.

"Please.....it was clearly not like what you said, you knew that situation at that time, didn't you?"

"So you would actually invent a lie like this. Ah ~ I, a faithful servant to the Lord, can only enter a convent now to clean my body and my mind; I didn't think that at such an age, I will have to move away from the red secular....."

"Is there any sincerity in you? You, who is technically in a heretical cult, and the witch of a religious order, don't talk like you're with something as pure as Catholicism!"

While Godou complained to Erica, pretending to be angry, he quickly glanced towards Anna.

.....She seemed to have seen a demon king sexually assault someone, and was now looking at me with angry, frightening eyes.

"How mean, saying that you were only a normal high school student.....I didn't think that you were such a demon who believed 'look, humans are like trash'.....and that you would use cheesy lines to deceive Erica-sama, and ravage her mercilessly.....it is really disgusting!"

"Please don't randomly think of a plot like that, does she look like someone who would be deceived by cheesy lines? Erica, you too, stop babbling nonsense; it's rude to invite someone just so you can tease him."

"Not everything is nonsense, but anyways, our relationship could be properly discussed later. Let's talk about the fight first."

So finally they enter the real subject.

Were the dishes sent to this table also made in preparation for the fight? Erica's drink wasn't something like grape wine, but merely mineral water.

"So? Why do I have to fight you?"

"So that you can prove your strength. There are knights who have inherited ancient magic gathering in Rome right now, discussing over who will keep the Gorgoneion. I suggested you, but the three others would only accept if you prove your strength. That's the story."

".....What is the Gorgoneion?"

"It is a mythological relic which appeared two months ago, on the coast of the Calabria. The Gorgoneion is the symbol of a goddess, lost long ago on Mother Earth. It is the road sign to darkness. Since there isn't much time left, I'll explain quickly——"

"There's no need, you don't need to say that to me. If it concerns gods, then I don't want to know."

Godou stopped her in the middle of her sentence just as Erica was about to start her explanation.

For some reason, Godou wanted to know the least possible about mythology; seeing Godou's attitude, Erica laughed at his stubbornness.

"But you have already met the girl, the one who was probably a [Heretic God], didn't you? I believe that you two are fated to fight each other, sooner or later. I can bet with you that at that time, you'll certainly ask me to tell you about her."

"Please don't say these unlucky things; let's talk about something else, why do I need to fight to prove my strength? Isn't there another way?"

"There isn't any other way. To us knights, a duel is the most important proof. To fight after endless training in martial arts, to show the courage of a lion, and finally receive the honor of victory —— a fight between two people who love each other so much, don't you think that it might become a wonderful night?"

"Who would think like that! I should say that this night would be a nightmare."

"You're really not honest with yourself. Ah ~ is it because there are people nearby that you feel shy?"

Erica pointed towards Anna with her head, who was silent and didn't dare interrupt the conversation of her mistress.

"Don't worry. After the battle, I won't let anyone bother us. We'll leave that for the end so we can slowly enjoy it."

Godou felt that his misfortune was brought on entirely by Erica.

Chapter 2 - Duel with the Diavolo Rosso

Part 1

The evening gradually became darker, and many stars hung high in the night sky——

Citing danger as a reason, Erica did not take Anna along with them.

Together with Godou, the pair proceeded to a hill near the famous Colosseum[1C 1] of Rome.

In the first few centuries AD, the city of Rome was built in the middle of seven hills[1C 2]. This is a well-known historical fact.

This particular hill was called the Palatine; in its Republican past it was a high-class residential area, and in the Empire it was the site on which the emperor's palace was built[1C 3].

But today it is only known as 'that place near the famous tourist attraction, the Roman Colosseum', and silently crumbled into a pile of ruins through neglect.

"Although still a spot for tourists, it is so much quieter compared to the Colosseum nearby."

Erica said what was on her mind.

It may have been because it was already past midnight, but due to the surrounding atmosphere, even if the spirit of a Roman nobleman appeared it wouldn't have seemed strange.

"That said, to see a building that has been around for more than 1500 years, still preserving its shape, you can't help but admire it."

The sections built from brick still remain.

Similarly for the pathway made from brick.

Walking slowly amidst the ruins, Godou looked around, noticing the surrounding landscape.

If it was possible, he wished he had come in the daytime, but this similarity to a test of courage was also very exciting.

There were no street lamps anywhere near them. But even without torches they both continued on naturally, because Erica and Godou both had owl-like night vision... this too, was because of the life or death situations he had gone through since this spring , that he could obtain such a superhuman constitution.

"Is that so? Ancient buildings such as these can be found anywhere, can't they? For example, medieval temples and castles. I know Japan also has quite a few, right?"

"Your examples are from completely different time periods. And besides, if you exclude those that are tourist attractions, they're hard to find."

Erica's opinion came from those who see things from a Neolithic point of view.

In the first place, for most of the cities in Italy, a large percentage of their buildings and names come directly from the Medieval period.

And if you're talking about the roads and the town as a whole, it's not an understatement to claim over half of them are historical relics.

Especially here at Rome, where the roads, sewage systems, the water supply and more were all facilities constructed in the Imperial period. They were used continuously, and with at most a simple bit of repair, could still function perfectly in the present.

"Godou, how long has it been since both of us were alone? Can you please not talk about such unromantic things? This is a rare, short rendezvous for us lovers."

Erica suddenly drew close.

She kept near Godou, and began to whisper these words in his ear.

Facing such an attractive maiden who displayed her affection so aggressively, no one, much less a healthy high-school boy, would not blush and grow nervous.

Godou of course is no different. However...

"I've already told you so many times— please stop making jokes like this! We should follow etiquette and establish a positive and healthy relationship!"

"I'm not joking. That was just a confirmation of mutual love from long separated lovers."

Erica ignored Godou's retort and moved her face even closer.

Their cheeks almost touching, Erica leaned her body nearer to his, and began to whisper words as sweet as honey.

Godou desperately backpedaled, and continuously retreated with all his might.

"We-We aren't lovers, so please stop now!"

"I only want you to quickly accept my proposal. What parts of me are you not satisfied with? My features, age and body are definitely fine... unless you have some sort of special fetish?"

"Stop speaking rubbish. I am a perfectly, completely normal guy ! This has nothing to do with fetishes!"

Erica continued her attempts to cling on to Godou, who was frantically retreating.

... To tell the truth, once you got used to both her willfulness and stubbornness, you couldn't help but find her cute. Godou just had to worry, that despite being constantly manipulated by her, he could not find it in himself to hate her.

That said, he was still unable to accept Erica's aggressive style of romance.

"I like Godou, and Godou also feels the same towards me, right? See, there are no problems at all, and even after marriage we would get along well. We might even be the world's strongest couple."

"And that is the problem! Stop arbitrarily deciding on things like marriage! I haven't even considered starting a family!"

Godou could just imagine it: having accepted her love, he would be kidnapped and forced into a church for the marriage ceremony.

If one assumes a normal lifespan to be eighty years, Godou hasn't even been around for a quarter of that time. It was natural that anyone would feel uncomfortable, if he decided on a lifetime partner with such meager life experience.

But there was an even more pressing reason.

Although Erica loudly proclaims herself to be Godou's lover, she is likely to have some sort of plan in mind.

"——Erm, Erica, please don't make use of me in some strange place, ok? I know that I owe you a lot, and even if you cause me great headaches, I still consider you a friend. I'll help you if you ask me normally, so please stop doing these sorts of embarrassing things."

Godou said this with sincerity.

It wasn't something to be happy about, but Godou knew that he wasn't the type who was popular with girls.

Kusanagi Godou is not a humorous person, and is useless when it comes to sensing other people's emotions.

His sister often calls him obtuse, or that he talks too much.

There was no way any interesting girls would like this sort of man, much less Erica. With her beauty and intelligence, she could choose anyone.

"Is the reason why you are trying to seduce me because of some kind of order from your corps? I understand that, so there is no need to flaunt yourself, and I don't want you to say these sorts of lies—— hey, are you listening?"

"I heard you... You really are amazingly slow. A beautiful flower appears before you, even asks you to pluck it... You don't understand its mind at all."

Erica, still sticking close to Godou, sighed.

Coming from her, this sigh is a rare, heartfelt expression of her worries.

"I wasn't ordered by my superiors to choose a lover. I can't believe that you can't even understand this simple point— really, you are a troublemaker."

Erica finally let go of his hand. Just as he began to relax, she bent over and kissed him.

And this wasn't a kiss on the cheek, but a soft kiss on the lips.

"This is your punishment for always being so cold to me... forget it, I'm willing to spend more time, so that you will finally understand my love. So for now, just prepare yourself for that moment!"

Erica, smiling lightly, looked exceptionally dazzling.

If this continued, he might begin to have some strange ideas, so Godou quickly changed the subject.

"That's right, there was something I wanted to ask about Anna-san."

"Un, Arianna is honest and generous, isn't she a great kid?"

Hearing her tone of voice, Godou's face grew momentarily stern .

"Don't call someone older than you 'a great kid', you should show more respect. But anyway, I want to ask you something more important. Tell me truthfully, did you deliberately order Arianna to drive me around?"

"... Wow, you really got into Anna's car. You really have the bravery of a lion, such great courage."

Facing Godou's direct gaze, Erica replied flippantly.

It seemed that she wasn't going to give a serious answer.

"If you're planning to use such a suspicious reply, the least you could do is look me in the eye. So that really was your scheme—did you know that I almost died?"

"Calling it a scheme is going too far. I just mentioned to her, if she drove you around for some sightseeing, you might feel happier... Arianna really is such a good kid."

The two chatted idly while walking.

Suddenly the view broadened before them, and they arrived at a spacious location.

"We've arrived. This will be our battleground, the remains of the Roman Emperor Augustus'[1C 4] palace."

Before his eyes were huge and broad walls, perhaps they used to be the awe inspiring bulwarks of the ancient palace.

All around were round columns, lying on the ground. Only a few were still standing.

Surrounded by all these things was a green patch of turf, on which three figures stood, waiting for them.

The first two were venerable.

They were probably the [Old Dame] and the [Female Wolf] that Erica mentioned.

Next was a young man. He was probably the [Purple Knight] of the [Capital of Lilies].

On that note, the knight corps they belonged to were secret associations.

In all the countries bordering on the Mediterranean, each one basically had multiple knight corps, which had the Medieval Knights Templar as a common root.

"It is an honor to meet you in person, Kusanagi Godou, for the first time."

In reply to the [Purple Knight]'s formal greeting, Godou bowed his head in reply.

"Hello, I am Kusanagi Godou. Although I've obtained this special physique due to certain reasons, there is no need for any of you to treat me with such respect. Please just treat me like any other normal person."

"...You are much too humble; one can tell you are no simple human from what you just said. This Italian of yours isn't something which can just be learnt from merely simple experience, is it?"

"She is correct. That just now was [Mille Lingua][1C 5] —— magic that can only be patiently honed for a long period of time.

And even then, those adept at it must grasp the secrets of language before he can learn the skill. One who can use the technique at such a young age, such as you, is surely a rare sight."

The two elders praised him, one after the other.

Ever since Godou became a Campione, he had never encountered the problem of trying to communicate with foreigners . After associating with them for three days, he was naturally able to both understand and speak their language.

He always thought it was an extremely convenient, but also incredibly pathetic ability. Who knew it actually had such a story behind it...

Just as Godou was at a loss for things to say, Erica, who stood by his side, raised her voice and said,

"Right, since all the actors are here, let's start the main event. [Purple Knight], can you please stand as arbitrator?"

"No problem, [Diavolo Rosso][1C 6]. Elders, if it pleases you to step back. This is a contest between the Campione and a great knight of the [Copper Black Cross], hence it would be safer to stay at a distance."

The older two nodded their head to the [Purple Knight]'s suggestion.

The outlines of the pair immediately start to fade, and in an instant, there is no trace of where they were.

"They really disappeared, how amazing."

"In your current state, that can't be any kind of amazing magic, right? They only hid their bodies, while watching in the distance. Don't get distracted by that, from here on out this is a stage for just the two of us."

Erica, leaving the suddenly nervous Godou, stood at a distance of about 5 meters.

From there, she called out to the [Purple Knight].

"Please give the starting signal."

"I wish you both the best of luck —— begin!"

Though Godou could not feel any sort of fighting spirit at all, nevertheless he reluctantly turned his body to face Erica.

Erica had changed her clothes before the match began.

She wasn't wearing the elegant dress from before, but a simple long sleeved shirt and slim black trousers, giving her more freedom of movement. In addition to this she had put on something resembling a red cape.

The red cloth had black patterns stitched onto it; Erica called that a banner.

Godou still remembered how she proudly boasted before, that a banner containing both red and black colors could only by worn by a great knight.

"O lion of steel and your ancestor, the lion-hearted king —— please hear the oath of the knight Erica Blandelli."

Erica began to intone the unearthly incantation to summon her weapon of choice.

She spoke clearly, as though delivering poetry.

The incantation or 'spell words' which people talk about, is the ability to bend the forces of magic to one's will.

"I am the valorous successor to the bugle, the descendant of the Black Knight. 'Til my fighting spirit is broken, my sword will never shatter. O lion-hearted king, I implore you— bring the essence of battle into my hand——!"

A sword appeared.

Into Erica's right hand, which was completely empty just a moment ago, a longsword suddenly appeared.

"Advance! The time for Cuore di Leone[1C 7] to fight has come!"

Erica's favorite blade, Cuore di Leone, was an elegant and fine longsword.

With an extraordinary length, and the lightness of a willow branch when swung, it was completely different from normal, steel swords. The blade reflected a brilliant, silvery light, and could be said to be more a work of art than a mere weapon.

But Godou knew very well that this was a demonic sword, which could easily cut through swords made of steel.

——In an instant, Erica closed the gap between them.

"Hey! Wait a minute!"

Cuore di Leone flashed like a bolt of lightning, aimed to pierce Godou's chest.

Even flinging himself to the side, he only just managed to evade it.

But Erica didn't pull back her sword, but rather swept it horizontally, as if to pursue Godou, who was evading her strikes.

For one who had barely escaped, he couldn't help but feel the chill of death travel down his spine.

Her fluid change of a thrust to a sweep was beautifully executed.

That attack was one which completely presaged all of Godou's possible responses.

"You're really trying to kill me, aren't you!? Actually attacking me carelessly with a real sword!"

"This is a duel, using real swords is completely natural."

"Don't use one! If I'm cut by that thing, I'm definitely going to die. Didn't you use this same sword to split concrete before? My body is going to be diced up like tofu!"

"Tofu is that ingredient made from soybeans, right? Don't worry — you're much stronger than that stuff. Even after suffering a blow from Lord Salvatore's demonic blade, didn't you still survive ? Having witnessed that battle, even I could not help but admire your tremendous vitality, and I wondered what would happen if you were hurt by me ——"

"... Erica, rather than deciding to duel with me, didn't you just want to test your weapon on my body?"

"Don't be silly. But this definitely is a rare opportunity for me, and it's true I don't want to just pass it over."

Hyuu.

Erica lightly angled her wrist, and Cuore di Leone lashed out like a whip towards Godou's neck —— this was probably an attack at his carotid artery.

He was totally unable to predict the natural movements of her strikes, and besides, they were extremely fast.

Godou was even unable to perfectly see them coming.

Depending partially on his intuition, he swung his head away. At least he got away from that one.

"How impressive... there are few people who can successively evade three strikes from my sword —— Ah! I forget, Godou is only partially human, so it's not totally inconceivable."

"For someone who continuously calls herself my darling, my lover, you sure don't hold back in trying to kill me! I think that is even more inconceivable than my body!"

"But that's only because my lover and my opponent happen to be the same person. There's nothing strange about it, and besides, I never wanted to kill you... although little accidents could still occur."

Erica elegantly brought her sword back on guard, while her expression had a sweet expression, just like a poisonous flower.

Her flirtatious manner was just too alluring.

"I apologize for the interruption, but I would ask you both to halt your flirting momentarily. Although I sympathize with the need for such passionate lovers to express their desire for each other, I must remind you that this duel is a sacred matter."

Having heard the [Purple Knight]'s admonition, Godou couldn't help but retort incredulously,

"If you think this is us flirting, you must be blind. Or maybe those eyes of yours are just for show?"

All these people were the sort who considered betting on one's life a game; which, of course, included Erica.

"Well said— let's enjoy our love later tonight, Godou. Right now, you must display your full prowess!"

Apart from his parents, basically no one else talked to Godou personally with his first name.

And to be specific, there was only one person in this world, who at times would whisper his name with such overflowing tenderness, and at other times call it out with such a firm and self-confident manner. And that person was Erica Blandelli.

... The problem being, while she used his name so lovingly in public, yet felt no problem in ruthlessly stabbing at Godou with her blade.

Erica once again swung her sword thrice in a single movement.

The first was a diagonal slash downwards, the next a rising cut, the last a vertical swing downwards, aimed directly at Godou's head.

All it took was one hit on his body, and Godou was a dead man.

But in that instant, Godou leapt backwards, then turned around and leapt further back again, and so managed to escape.

"There's no way for us to decide a victory if all you do is dodge. And more importantly, I'm getting bored."

"Please stop! You know just as well as I do, this strength of mine is a complicated ability which I can't use at will, and when I do, I can't control its strength. How can I, just use it whenever you want me to!?"

"Still going on about the same pacifistic things... well, then I'll press you with something even more dangerous than just a sword. If you don't want to lose, then you'd better get more serious about this fight!"

Erica lithely vaulted backwards, her feet pressing on the ruined wall, left from the period of Imperial Rome.

"Soar, sandals of Hermes![IC 8]"

Accompanying this short incantation, she began to run along the walls, her soles tapping against the brick.

"Cuore di Leone —— Thus I order you to this mission, O lion of steel. May you rend, skewer and rip apart the foe! May you conquer, annihilate the enemy, and seize victory! I leave the battlefield to you."

After Erica tenderly caressed the blade of her favorite longsword, and kissed it lightly...

She tossed out her sword.

It fell on the dead center of the grassy field on which Godou stood.

"...Now what are you up to?"

Puzzled, Godou watched the sword which stood completely still, about five meters away. If Erica wanted to impale him, there was no way she would have missed at this distance.

—— As he expected, the sword started to change.

The sword which was stuck in the ground began to grow in size .

The silvery metal expanded continuously and gradually took on the shape of a lion, such a realistic sculpture.

But it did not just look like a lion, for it grew to a huge size.

...But what was even more incredible, the silver lion was no normal carving. The lion growled, then turned forward to face Godou, and focused on his target.

The statue's every movement was exactly like a lion.

"You want to attack me with that!"

Godou was both appalled and awestruck at the lion's immensity.

The head of the beast was almost two stories high.

Perhaps if there was a bus or a truck around, he might have had a chance of fending off the giant beast. But for Godou, measuring 179 centimeters and 64 kilograms, there was perhaps just a bit too much of a difference in their respective weights.

——The giant lion lifted up its front legs, preparing to bring them down with a crash.

It moved scarily fast, swiping at Godou's head.

It wouldn't be far-fetched to compare this to a falling steel pylon from a construction site.

Godou frantically dodged.

The ground which he stood on a moment ago was already torn and rent by the wickedly sharp claws and that immense weight. If he actually got hit, there would be nothing left of him except a bloody mess on the pavement.

Part 2

The lion happily chased after the maniacally dodging Godou.

It struck with lightning speed with its front paws, or attacked with canines or claws as sharp as swords, tearing things apart, and sometimes flung its body at him, as though it was trying to crush a small animal.

"It seems as though his Majesty isn't very motivated for this duel."

The person who said this to Erica was the nearby [Purple Knight].

At some unknown time, he must have used sorcery, because he was now standing on the top of the wall.

"If he only continues to dodge and evade, there will be no means for us to determine his strength. Well, your expression informs me that you pre-empted what I said long beforehand."

In reply to the tall youth's comment, Erica revealed a brilliant smile.

"I already considered that this might very well happen. Besides, my Lord never enjoyed fighting with people... however, that is only at the beginning of a duel."

"Oh? So what you mean is...?"

"However my Lord tries to deny it, he is a Campione. He is one able to equal a god in combat, a man who has usurped the ultimate , unconquerable power. Despite his constant words to the contrary, he cannot truly hate combat. If all Campione are similar, Kusanagi Godou too is a genius at the art of battle, and is also a victor amongst victors."

"Umm... although I do not disagree, he is still most skilled at evasion."

The [Purple Knight] looked down suspiciously at him.

Erica looked lovingly at the youth, who was desperately running here and there.

"Things will change soon— he is almost at the point where he has nowhere else to run to. The parliament has a report on Kusanagi Godou, have you perused the document?"

"I have read it, but it is hard to believe, and I remain highly skeptical."

"If we judge the report based on its trustworthiness, perhaps about 60% of it is accurate. To be able to conduct such good investigations is quite impressive."

"So you're telling me that what is in the document is real? That Kusanagi Godou's ability is to adapt to the enemy he is facing and the surrounding situation —— an ability that gives him the strength to overcome all obstacles?"

"Of course! Please watch, [Purple Knight]!"

Before their eyes, the situation suddenly reversed.

Facing the lion's looming front paws, Godou took a stand for the first time.

In order to escape being mauled by the sharp silver claws, he carefully stepped back then leapt forward, and wrapped both arms around its paw.

Then he lifted it up.

Grabbing on, he simply lifted the immense bulk of the lion.

Just like a weight lifting competitor, Godou, measuring 179 centimeters, raised the huge lion, as large as a truck, high into the air.

"What ——! What sort of strength is that!"

"In myth, it is said that the hero Hercules had divine strength, enough to support the sky. The war god that Godou defeated, Verethragna, has a very similar origin to Hercules— hence Godou can equal him in terms of strength."

Erica proudly explained to the dumbfounded [Purple Knight].

Godou had now already raised the silver lion to face the heavens, and the lion's four feet were off the ground, flailing about in the air.

One could call that a strange strength beyond the ordinary.

"I remember that this was written on the parliament's report, '... We have termed the ability that Kusanagi Godou obtained the [Persian Warlord]. The battle deity Verethragna's ability was to change into ten different forms, entering countless battles and leaving each victorious. Hence Kusanagi Godou is clearly also a monster, able to change his strengths at will ——"

An elder suddenly interrupted with those words.

The commander [Female Wolf] had appeared at some time at Erica and the [Purple Knight]'s side.

"Oh, Venerable—— is it just you?"

"Mmm. That old rascal from Turin is still hiding like a mouse in a corner somewhere. I certainly don't intend to miss seeing the new Campione's strength up close, so let me watch his strength with my own eyes."

The commander [Female Wolf] spoke in the Roman dialect, impolitely tossing out her insult, and even let a smile spread across her face.

She was the leader of Rome's knights and sorcerers, and disliked the [Old Dame] who had their stronghold at Turin.

"I felt Lord Salvatore to be very young when he became a Campione, and this time, the King here is even younger. Other than sharing that godly strength, is Kusanagi Godou able to change between different abilities?"

"So if Kusanagi Godou wishes to use those abilities, a requirement is that his enemies had strength enough to overwhelm him?—— at least, that is what the parliament's report said about it..."

The magical leader of Rome and the [Purple Knight] spoke in unison.

Facing the inquiring looks of the pair, Erica grinned with satisfaction and replied calmly.

"When he meets an enemy with unnaturally great muscular strength, Kusanagi Godou is able to obtain and use one of Verethragna's ten forms: the [Bull]. Verethragna has ten transformations in total, and while it is currently unknown if he can utilize all of them, it is confirmed that he already has a few."

A gust of [Wind], the [Bull], the [White Stallion], the [Camel], the [Boar], the [Youth], the [Raptor], the [Ram], the [Goat], and the [Hero].

When the ten transformations of Verethragna are compared, the [Bull] and the [Camel] are most closely related to the earth, but they are also a direct symbol for those greatest in strength, greatest in constitution, and greatest in fighting spirit.

Hence these attributes naturally became identified with divine powers or a symbol of fierceness, receiving adulation and reverence.

And today, before their eyes, Godou easily destroyed the silver lion.

The lion's huge bulk was lifted and flung out, and crashed into the ground.

Next, he rushed on top of the sprawled lion, stepping on its neck and chest with his foot.

Then, he grasped the foreleg, and wrenched with his feet placed firmly on the lion's body. The lion was easily ripped apart.

Next he attacked the lion's chin, chest and abdomen, viciously kicking it without pause, till its entire body resembled a V shape.

"—— I've destroyed your toy! So now you'll fight me personally , right? Get down here, I'll end this now!"

"Oh, he finally got serious."

Godou looked up unhappily at Erica.

Seeing Godou's unsatisfied look, the [Purple Knight] nodded with satisfaction.

"For someone who usually mouths off about pacifism, he seeks victory without mercy when he warms to the fight... Well, my lover is calling for me, so I'll excuse myself."

The agile Erica leapt to the ground.

Watching the golden-haired maiden beautifully execute the jump, Godou once again felt a sense of regret.

Who would have thought that in this foreign country, he was forced to duel with someone again...

Although he had already guessed this was a likely outcome when he agreed to Erica's plea for him to come to Italy, he couldn't help but feel depressed when this actually happened.

"... Erica, you know that the difference between a civilized man and a savage one comes from the degree of capability in dealing with things in a civilized manner. I'm begging you; can you please

learn to curb your violent instincts, and your frequent need to go making trouble for others? Do you know how hard it is for those who try to stay around you?"

"Still, on the same old topic? I don't see any problem with it, especially because while you always start off shunning a fight, the minute it actually starts you get so serious. You actually really love this, don't you? Why not be a little more honest with yourself?"

Facing Godou's endless complaints, Erica replied flippantly.

"You are a King and I am a knight. We have an obligation to stage an intense but exquisite duel. So let us fight each other with all our love, and make this duel the climax of our romance!"

"From my experience, lovers don't bet their lives in duels like this! Don't go pushing your ideas of romance on other people!"

Godou both retorted violently, and carefully watched the golden-haired maiden.

The silver lion had already been smashed, and so Erica should have lost the materials for her longsword... but he couldn't imagine Erica becoming unarmed because of that.

"O Cuore di Leone —— you are the unyielding blade. 'Til my fighting spirit is broken, my sword will never shatter. O lion, I implore you once again; return into my hand!"

Erica stretched out her hand towards the silver wreckage of Cuore di Leone.

The wreck, which originally had the shape of a lion, began to shrink; the torn portions began to meld back together, and again changed its form.

Miraculously, the wreck molded itself back into a sword, and flew back to Erica.

"You're still doing such absurd things, and after I finally managed to break it..."

However, this was all still within his expectations.

'Erica coming to the battle field without a sword? That's impossible.' Godou, who understood this logic, looked on with an unsurprised gaze.

Thank goodness the monstrous strength from the [Bull] was still present.

He could probably still use it for another ten minutes or so, and hoped that he could achieve victory in this time limit.

—— That power of Godou's, which London sorcerers named the [Persian Warlord], was an ability that gave him unimagined power, but only in special, specific circumstances.

For example, calling upon the [Bull], he is able to wield a godly strength.

But before it can be used, he must be facing an enemy with extraordinary physical power.

That said, however...

Last month, Godou was attacked by a man weighing 138 kilograms (who obviously knew martial arts). However, he was unable to manifest the [Bull], and suffered extremely painfully. It seemed that only a superhuman type of strength—— say, a train carriage which was hurtling at full speed, or a man eating tiger which weighed more than 300 kilograms; if that was the sort of enemy, he could call it forth.

In addition, there were skills which Godou could only use when he had suffered a fatal injury.

Even if these skills could only be used to fight 'great sinners who have brought great suffering to the people', each and every skill seemed to make people fear that it was a type of evil itself. And besides, the requirements were all extremely troublesome to fulfill.

"... For I am strongest amongst the strong. Truly, I am one that holds each and every victory. I care not whom challenges me, whether man or devil— I may face all my foes and all my enemies. Regardless, I shall crush all those who wouldst stand in my way!"

Godou, while contemplating the mighty aspect of the bull, muttered this verse.

This was a battle hymn chanted to call the war god Verethragna to the fight. To put it simply, it was a method to maintain the god's strength, like a fuel to keep it burning.

He still had ten minutes before the strength of the [Bull] receded .

If he used a form once, he would have to wait a whole day before he could use it again. And if he changed to a different form, the currently active one would vanish. Hence, Godou could not use it carelessly.

So while his ability was ridiculously strong, it also had many restrictions on how it was used.

"I have to hand it to you, Godou. Although you're still blabbing about 'pacifism', your body and mind have already readied itself for the fight—— it's because of this that you qualify to be my lover !"

Erica praised him in that annoying way, and then pointed with her finger.

Thrust in the ground next to Godou's foot was a greatspear, about one and a half meters. It was probably similar to Cuore di Leone, both summoned by Erica's magic.

"... You want me to use this?"

"Of course, the honorable Erica Blandelli would never duel with someone completely unarmed. For the current Godou, wielding that spear should be a piece of cake, right?"

"Why do you only think when it comes to this sort of thing... since you want to make the fight fair, why not put down your weapon? That way it'll be more fair."

Godou sighed and picked up the spear.

He remembered that in his hand was Erica's beloved spear, which had a magical core embedded in the handle. It was so heavy even a grown man couldn't lift it, yet she so easily twirled and raised this steel spear. Truly, what monstrous strength.

It was probably the benefits of a body strengthening type of sorcery.

Though Erica seemed slender and frail, the strength in her grip was far greater than Godou's.

But that was only in normal circumstances. To the current Godou, even if this spear was three times heavier, he could still pick it up as easily as a toothpick.

Godou shifted his grip on the spear like a baseball bat, and a gust of wind was produced by the single movement.

—— Erica happily charged at him.

Just like a shadow, it was impossible to see her movements, and because her violent actions had almost no wind resistance. This sort of technique could only be patiently trained.

Cuore di Leone silently moved through the air.

When Godou finally realized that, the silver blade was already approaching his face.

"—— Can't you be more careful?! You're fighting a novice!"

To make a comparison, what just happened was like a world class boxer punching with all his might.

And this wasn't some fleshy fist, but a deadly, hard blade.

Just as if he was playing a game of dodge ball, where Godou prioritized evading the speeding ball aiming for his head, he evaded Erica's sword thrust.

Because he had never learnt any martial arts, he could only rely on his sharp eyesight and fast reflexes to preserve his life.

"But Godou, anyone able to dodge my attack just now definitely cannot be called a novice."

"But that was just by luck, and you're aiming for spots which are 100 percent fatal if they strike home!"

Ever since he had become a Campione, the moment he stepped onto a battlefield, his concentration could rise to an unimaginable level.

It was also thanks to this that he was able to see Erica's superhumanly fast sword thrust.

Godou had played baseball ever since he started primary school . In middle school[TC 9] he would have been the catcher or the fourth hitter – cleanup - even in semi-professional teams.

At that point he was in his physical prime, and he could match any fastball thrown by the opposition.

Perhaps because of that, he was more comfortable with a Campione's constitutional abnormality.

The 'constitutional abnormality' that Godou was thinking about, was his ability to suddenly heighten concentration and maintain his peak physical condition, the minute he entered a battlefield. If he could use this during normal sporting events as well, he was confident he could hit a homerun even against a ball-throwing machine of 190 miles an hour.

...In fact, he could probably engage that change.

The moment he had to go all out, his body would naturally configure itself for optimum functionality. It had become like this ever since Godou became a Campione.

Although Godou loves sports, he did not enter a sporting club in high school.

This was because he felt that this ability of his was too unfair, too much like cheating, when competing against other people.

"Damn you, ever since we started you've done whatever the hell you wanted—— I'm warning you now, I can't control the strength of my attack, so you'd better dodge well!"

Thus Godou shouted while brandishing the spear.

Although he was never interested in dueling, he knew that in these circumstances, if he only defended and never attacked, it was inevitable that the opponent would crush him.

To ensure Erica's safety, he used the spear's shaft instead of the blade to sweep at her ankle.

But she leapt aside.

Pressing the attack, as if to chase after the fleeing Erica, Godou continued to strike, this time bringing the spear down above her.

This time, Erica did not leap to evade the attack.

Only moving backwards by a small margin, she dodged the strike, and then charged forward.

Simultaneously thrusting her sword like a needle she aimed for Godou's chest.

This was a counter strike!

Having suspected Erica's plan Godou deliberately chose not to dodge – but it was also because he was out of time – and swept the spear which Erica had dodged horizontally.

Only relying on the flick of his wrist, the steel spear moved like a whip, poised to strike the slender maiden.

This was a cross-counter impossible for a normal person, but for the [Bull]'s monstrous strength this was easily accomplished.

It happened in an instant.

Just before he was to be impaled by Cuore di Leone, he successfully warded off Erica.

"Geez... Your reflexes are as keen as ever— you never change, do you?"

Although her counter strike failed, Erica simply laughed it off.

It seems that she didn't suffer an injury. The truth be told, the instant before the spear struck home, she also jumped backwards to avoid the attack. He had to hand it to Erica, both her attacks and her defenses were perfect.

Facing such an expert how was he to defeat her?

The answer lay in careful scrutiny.

Godou had done this for such a long time. The more distant victory was and the greater the pressure to obtain it, the faster his eyes and mind worked.

The enemy's every move, expressions, gaze.

As long as there was even a slight glimmer of hope, he would seize it. Ascertaining the opponent's character, discerning the opponent's pattern of thought; he would use both observation and analysis to confirm the other's movements.

Whether the enemy was a human, a god or a monster, as long as he grasped their psyche, he would be able to formulate a plan for victory.

From some point onwards, all of Godou's concentration was placed on attaining 'victory'.

That was no sudden change, but rather was a natural outcome of his actions.

This extended duel, in addition to his opponent being both a genius at the sword and a wielder of arcane magic, allowed Godou to completely absorb himself in combat.

Erica had no weaknesses. And even if she did, he could not see them.

But he deeply understood Erica's character, which was completely opposite to her devil-like mischievousness. She truly believed in an honorable and fair style of combat, and would never conserve her strength.

Her favorite battle tactic was the frontal charge, and using her greatest strength and her full spirit, at that.

That Erica was currently not doing this, was probably because she wanted to draw out all of Godou's strength, and so purposely toned down her attacks.

"Craftiness is written all over your face. The intelligence of a fox and the ferocity of a lion —— now that is the Godou I love! Give me all you've got, I accept your challenge!"

Hearing Erica say this, Godou momentarily flashed a grin.

Then, he smiled grimly.

Whatever he said before, he couldn't deny that dueling was very exciting. That there was an opponent willing to handle his attacks could only make him feel happy. Because of this thought, he inadvertently grinned.

Which should he choose? The forms with the greatest destructive power were either the [White Stallion] or the [Boar].

He currently was unable to call on the [White Stallion]. But he could probably use the [Boar] ——

"Thou hast violated the pact, and sinned on earth. The Lord hath spoken —— The sinner must be punished. May his spine be crushed, may his bones be broken, his tendons torn, his hair ripped from his skull— may his blood, spilled over the earth, be churned into a bloody froth. I shall become one who buries fangs into the sinner's flesh, that the will of the Lord be followed— Thou shalt be purged!"

Originally, this was an oracular verse from the sacred texts.

The verse was suddenly turned into an incantation, and flowed from Godou's mouth.

"The Boar shall ravage you! The Boar shall exterminate you!"

This was the Campione: "This is my boast of victory over the gods, the paean of my strength!"

This was the man turned into a devil: "This is my taunt at the gods, who are my foes!"

This was the victor: "This is my declaration of defiance, in order to grasp my godslaying strength!"

"O aethereal[1C 10] Gods, ye all who hath heard this verse of mine, rage at the death of your brethren!"

"O chthonic[1C 11] Gods, ye all who hath heard this verse of mine, wait uselessly for the day when my sacrilege returns for me! "

"O marine gods, ye all, who hath heard this verse of mine, mourn with adirge at your own helplessness!"

"I am the foe of all gods! I am the usurper of divine strength!"

Compelled by his devil-like ability, Godou unknowingly chanted these verses.

"What is the cause of this earthquake?!"

"He just uttered the name of the [Boar], thus it should be an ability of that Lord... Verethragna's fifth incarnation, a boar with wickedly sharp tusks. Legend has it, that it could crush any object with one blow ——"

The wall on which the commander [Female Wolf] and the [Purple Knight] stood began to shake.

The previous incantation of Godou's was exactly that: a hymn to summon the divine beast called 'the bearer of ruin'.

Perhaps it was because one felt as though the beast would really descend from the heavens, the sky shook while gathering storm clouds and the earth trembled while rumbling with minor earthquakes.

"To, to come to this... To use even the [Boar] when dueling with an opponent as weak as me, how heartless are you! If you mess this up, not just the hill and the Roman Colosseum, but even the Forum Roman will be completely flattened!"

Erica gave off a rare emotion; that of worry.

Seeing this atypical anxious look, Godou felt a great sense of satisfaction.

"If I used conventional methods against you, I would have no chance at victory. So, I decided to use the strongest attack which was available to me at this moment."

In the air above Godou and the others, a distortion of space appeared. Between the 'real' world and the 'imaginary' world – which was not meant to exist – appeared a path accessed through the cracks of both. There appeared a huge, ferocious beast, wrapped in dark black fur, fighting to escape from the distortion.

Its body was even larger than the lion Erica had summoned. Twice its size, in fact.

Its entire length was at least 20 meters.

At the moment only the nose to the neck could be seen, along with two huge, sharp tusks.

Just a few more minutes, and it would completely enter the 'real ' world.

This gigantic bulk couldn't yet be fully seen, and it couldn't yet be definitively called a 'ferocious monster', but the features, especially the nose and tusks, were definitely those of a boar's.

Godou and Erica had seen the awesome strength of the monster themselves before.

Underneath the dark fur of the [Boar], was a chilling amount of muscle.

Originally, this was a manifestation of Verethragna's desire to vanquish the enemies of his patron deity, Mithras. The burly, divine beast which Godou called forth was exactly the manifestation of the [Boar].

He didn't know why, but the conditions for enabling this ability were very broad.

As long as Godou 'had a huge object as a target, and was determined to crush it', the condition was satisfied. He had never tested before exactly how large or small the object needed to be, but as long as it looked heavier than ten tons, it could be specified as a target.

And, the [Boar]'s manifestation was not only concerned with immensity of size.

"I knew Godou was anything but normal— all that talk of peace was just some platitudes... Eloi, Eloi, Lama Sabachthani![1C 12] My God! Why hast thou forsaken me!"

Erica raised her sword to the heavens, loudly singing the sacred hymn.

He had heard this many times before, the incantation to release her most powerful magic.

"O Lord! I wail and beg through the day, yet you forsake me— I cry and pray through the night, yet you ignore me. But you remain the most holy, you that have the praise of Israel as your throne!"

The despondent incantation shook the air, and began to freeze over the whole earth.

Godou's body began to tremble faintly.

That was because the surrounding temperature was decreasing at an alarming rate.

...In the end, she still used this technique. Because Erica never restrained herself in her attacks, it was easy to predict her overall plan; actually, it was probably because she thought it didn't matter if someone saw through her plan, as long as she crushed the enemy.

Godou momentarily glanced down at the grass near his feet.

A good chance to get one last confirmation on his target.

"Though each bone of my body is shattered, my heartache melts like a lit candle. You shall bury me in the dust of dead earth! Wild dogs surround me, Evil Company hems me in!

God sits aloof in heaven, unwilling to lend aid.

To be alone is to despair, difficulty gives rise to curses."

This incantation, filled with negative emotions, suffused the earth, and Erica, being the current spellcaster, was focusing all that negative energy.

The temperature continued to plummet, and was now at the point where even bones started to ache from the cold.

"O Lord my Savior, I beseech you— aid me! Snatch me away from the weapons of the enemy, snatch me from the jaws of the lion, snatch me from the horns of the bull!"

The instant before the Messiah's death, this was both a funeral dirge and a paean of exaltation which he sang, despairingly and longingly.

Simply hearing the words themselves, the average human would be blinded; the physically weak would even collapse. If the spellcaster wanted to, this incantation could even kill off everyone then present.

Godou threw aside his spear, and suddenly bent down. He grabbed the pebble which he checked was there, lying in the grass just a moment ago, and immediately flung it outwards. This was an action he had performed countless times in basketball courts.

What he aimed at was Erica's chest.

Godou was supremely confident in his arm strength and accuracy; from this distance, there was no way he could miss.

Although this was merely a pebble, one should not underestimate it. Since antiquity, a thrown stone was the simplest and cheapest weapon, yet possessed sufficient deadliness to kill a man. Even the Christians have it, the weapon which David used to kill Goliath was the stone.[1C 13]

——But Erica shot it down with Cuore di Leone.

"My God! Why hast thou forsaken me!"

The overwhelming strength of this incantation required the full concentration of the spell caster. This was a minor error in judgment that made the difference in a life or death situation. For Godou, his chance for victory rested in this very moment.

Erica did not consider Godou's master plan, so she casually used her blade.

Godou didn't summon the [Boar] in order to crush Erica.

That was only a feint —— encouraging her to momentarily relax her pinpoint accuracy.

Seeing the instant when the sword moved, Godou began his attack.

When manifesting the [Boar], Godou himself gained a boar-like charging ability.

...But it was just a mad dash in a straight line. If he used this in rugby or a sprint it might not matter, but in a duel facing a sword wielding foe, it really didn't appeal to him.

However, if an opponent's stance fumbles, it was possible to seize the gap in his defence to batter him down.

If his opponent was a regular swordsman, his plan of a sudden attack would probably have the opponent easily defeated.

The problem was that this enemy was a monster far beyond the common man.

Erica instantly corrected her weak posture. One could say this was her scariest aspect; she had an extraordinary sense of balance.

Cuore di Leone flashed, and cut downwards at Godou, back bent to pierce Erica.

'Thank goodness the [Boar]'s speed was just that much faster.'

Only the end of the blade, near the hilt, scored Godou's arm.

The cut was very light, and was probably only skin deep.

Even if one was an expert, there was no way to use that part of the weapon to kill someone. If Godou's attack had been any slower , the sharpness of the blade and the speed of his charge might have split him in two...

Meanwhile, Godou heaved a sigh of relief, while grabbing onto Erica and pinning her to the ground.

"——!?"

Even if it was Erica, there was no way to face the [Boar]'s charging speed.

Godou had her completely pinned, sitting on top of her body.

Of course, he immediately restrained the hand which held Cuore di Leone.

Part 3

The two stared at each other for a time.

"...If it's possible, I'd prefer to be in this position when we're alone together, on a bed."

"Sto- Stop cracking jokes like that— anyway, is this enough? I've already checked your movements; this duel should be my victory, right?"

Facing a stubborn Erica, Godou retorted coldly.

"That last move was somewhat underhand. You didn't attack from the front, it wasn't elegant at all."

Godou knew very well what Erica was trying to say.

No matter how good his plan was, to force Erica to prepare her strongest move as the decisive blow, yet deciding victory before she could use it, was a pretty pathetic strategy. To use sumo wrestling as an example, it would be as though a Yokotsuna master[TC 14] challenged you to a match, yet attacking you by surprise with a distraction.

"It's not enough that I defeat you, but I have to do it elegantly? With you as my enemy, there's no way I can do such an amazing thing. And anyway, whether it's dirty or despicable, a win is a win, right?"

"Geez... It's because you think this way, that you have no chance at winning a beautiful victory. Forget it, it's because you're just this sort of guy that you've managed to keep winning till now... Fine, I admit defeat. It's my own fault that I fell for that trick. But this is the last time, you hear? This is the last time it'll happen!"

"... I get it; don't pout like a primary schooler just because you lost."

Erica's unhappy expression was just like a child throwing a tantrum. Those watching couldn't help but smile inside.

But, Godou changed his mind two seconds after.

Erica suddenly smiled with a wicked look on her face.

Only when she found it interesting to tease Godou, would that devil-like expression show.

"Godou, it's been so long since we hugged each other so tightly like this——"

"Ah, no, this isn't another one of your awkward, steamy situations, is it?"

When he found out the danger, it was already too late.

Erica wrapped her empty left arm around Godou's neck.

"This is perfect. Let me give you a victory kiss. It's a man's job to take the lead in these moments, you know?"

Those luscious, cherry red lips, whispering those sweet words, looked so fresh and filled with desire.

"Stop playing around, didn't I just tell you to stop with your antics?"

"What? I don't know what you're talking about, sorry. Because of the shock I suffered from my lover's betrayal, I don't remember anything."

Usually, Godou made sure to not pay attention, but Erica's figure was dangerous.

Her figure was as slim as a cypress tree, but the parts which were meant to be full, were full to the point that it was hard to know where to look.

Her heavy and ample breasts seemed just like luscious fruits, and from the slender waist to the perfectly curved back, this was arousing enough to be considered criminal.

And now this same maiden was pressing her body so close to him, even now feeling her warmth, even now tempted by her sweet kisses.

'I can't let Erica lead me by the nose!'

This was a completely different sort of battle from before, now the duel was between him and his reason.

The wafting perfume on Erica's body, her warmth and her softness to the touch, had Godou dizzy with sensations, but he continued to remind himself of his purpose.

"Erica, these sorts of things should only be done by couples who are properly going out, so I don't think we should do this. Besides, there are people around us, so please stop!"

"I want to do this, what's wrong? As long as Godou is interested , and we both agree, then there's no problem. If you're that worried about other people looking on, why not just switch locations?"

Perhaps it was because Erica could already see that Godou was becoming affected, but when she smiled again, it was most suspicious.

You might compare it to how the sun encourages travelers to take off their cloaks. She too revealed that wicked grin. 'I've got to escape from this devil's clutches, the sooner the better!'

Having decided, Godou stood up fiercely.

It was only then that he noticed the ground was still shaking.

And shaking fiercely, at that.

Probably around a three on the Richter scale.

"Kusanagi Godou, I have now indeed witnessed your strength, which, if I may say, exceeded my expectations."

"That you would even be able to tame a divine beast of this sort, the powers held by a lord are truly worthy of praise, and truly command the greatest reverence."

"Hence, in accordance to the pledge of the Lady Erica, We here thus acknowledge and confirm you truly as a Campione, this I pledge as representative of my corps."

The knights laboriously walked across the shaking ground towards them.

The [Purple Knight] and the commander [Female Wolf], along with the [Old Dame] who suddenly appeared, meant that everyone was present.

"But there is one thing which we would request from you, is it possible to for you to end this horrendous rattling?"

"Yes, if you do not send the beast home soon, I fear the results will be grave..."

Hearing the [Purple Knight]'s plea, Godou nodded his head and agreed.

Since victory had already been decided, there really was no need to keep the [Boar] on earth. Godou concentrated for a moment, then thought,

'That's enough, you can go back now.'

This way, the huge animal would disappear, and he could go back to sleep... but things like that never go to plan.

The [Boar] didn't disappear.

'Oi! I came especially at your summons, and now you just send me back just like that?' Partway materialized, the animal gave of an unwilling gleam in its eye, and was struggling about.

"Sorry, but he doesn't seem to want to go back..."

"But that will be disastrous! A divine beast of that sort really rampaging around Rome would be the worst outcome possible."

"That is certainly the case. Whatever it is, we must stop matters from ever getting that bad."

Both the [Purple Knight] and the Commander [Female Wolf] looked extremely uneasy.

Added to that, the [Boar] overhead was now almost fully materialized.

If it was let out, it would definitely fall to the ground, and happily destroy everything.

"The last time you summoned it, after the target was destroyed it returned by itself. Did you ever ask it to go back before that?"

"Yes. It wasn't very happy about it, but it went back obediently."

After Godou answered Erica's question, he hit upon a probability.

"About my control over the [Boar], perhaps I still haven't achieved complete obedience. Even if I gave an order, it may not comply."

"If so, all we can do is let the celestial beast quickly destroy the selected target, and send him back at the soonest opportunity? I think this is the best method of reducing damage."

The leader, [Old Dame], gave her advice with a grave tone.

It was the most appropriate suggestion.

The only problem was, the target itself —— as to what it was, Erica had long already worked it out from Godou's gaze.

"Godou, you couldn't have selected me as the target to summon the [Boar], I'm not large enough to be considered a valid target."

"...Yeah, I did choose something else as its target, yes."

Because Godou didn't want to be questioned carefully, he unknowingly started to sound evasive.

But Erica saw her chance, and precisely pin-pointed it,

"The only thing here that could attract Godou's attention, should be 'that'. 'That' is the most distinctive thing around here, and also the largest. But someone who's always preaching about common sense wouldn't choose something like that, right? Even though it is a really dirty tourist attraction, it's still a world heritage site, right?"

Erica continued to probe deeply.

'Damn, she just wants to savor each and every moment she gets to make me suffer.'

"The 'that', you're referring to... can't be that, can it?"

The commander [Female Wolf] questioned with a trembling voice, then with a trembling finger pointed to 'that'.

She pointed outwards, indicating a place not far from this hill, the huge arena from the Imperial period —— There stood the Roman Colosseum.

... Under the tyranny of Nero, it was the ruins of a man-made lake[1C 15], and took a period of eight years to complete.

It was finished under the reign of the Emperor Titus in 80 AD. A hundred days of games were put on in it as a celebration, and 9000 wild beasts were killed.

After that, this place continued to take the lives of thousands, tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of fighters and beasts.

That continued till the Middle Ages, when it became a convenient stone quarry to quarry stone for building, whenever someone wanted to build a magnificent church or mansion. Truly, it is a huge relic which has stood two thousand years of history.

"Erm... Because 'that' was pretty much the only thing that could be a target, in the heat of the moment I..."

And just as Godou ashamedly confessed...

The summoning of the [Boar] was finally completed, and the body had fully materialized.

From its sharp tusks to the hooves of its feet, and even to the tail , it was now a full part of this world, and a body mass of close to ten tons fell onto the earth.

"_____!!!!!!!!"

"_____!!!!!!!!!!!!!!"

A beast which obviously could not exist on this earth bellowed an immense roar.

Heeding its ferocious will, it suddenly began to stampede.

Each time the black furred [Boar] struck the earth with its feet, a quake of incomparable violence would strike the whole area —— No, it was shaking up the whole district of Rome.

And of course, its target was the Roman Colosseum before its eyes.

The divine beast had appeared before the target in the blink of an eye, and began to create destruction on a shockingly vigorous scale.

———————————

For the next three days after that, the incident aroused global news coverage, and received the front page headline "Rome Suffers from a Terrorist Bombing! The Mysterious Destruction of the Roman Colosseum!" The real reason behind it was this.

Part 4

"You're going back already? And I just got to know you, such a pity..."

"C'mon... just relax and stay for another one week— even two weeks is fine, right? Then we can go out together and play— there's just not enough lovey-dovey time between us..."

Anna and Erica both said reluctantly.

Godou continued to pack his few belongings, while replying both of them with completely different answers.

"I feel the same way, Miss Anna. If you ever get a chance to visit Japan, please contact me, I will certainly make the effort to find you. Erica, stop spouting such irresponsible suggestions, how can I skip school for so long? And we don't need lovey-dovey time, definitely don't need it!"

This was a hotel room that Erica had booked.

Last night, after the semi-destruction of the Colosseum, Godou slept like a log in this room.

...Having suffered the [Boar]'s wanton destruction and its result, the cultural heritage that humanity inherited suffered a huge blow.

In order to stop the tragedy, Godou did the best he could.

Tirelessly, he continuously gave out orders, and finally sent the [Boar] back.

However, the Colosseum was already half gone before that, and now the half gone architecture was again destroyed further by another half, and the lucky portion remaining was now only a portion of the original.

With the exception of one person, all other Italians were definitely gaping at the devastation.

"Anyway, Milan also sacrificed their Castella Sforzesco[1C 16]. If Rome doesn't sacrifice something like their Colosseum, their overwhelming advantage in thousands of other sites is just completely unfair."

That one person being Erica – also known as the devil, who happily said these words.

This matter could very well become another stick she could use to threaten him, and used as a reason to call him back to Italy. That day was probably not far off.

And because of this incident, the three Grandmasters became even more reverent.

"Is that so, the incident with the Castella Sforzesco, that is, the reason for its collapse was also..."

"I understand now, with this sort of strength, even that sort of destruction will be child's play..."

The commander [Old Dame] nodded deeply in understanding, while the [Purple Knight] next to her also had the same impression .

With his previous misdeeds discovered, Godou could only sink his head in shame, while Erica happily smiled.

"Whether it is the San Felica doorway of Palermo, or the Port of Cagliari[1C 17] in Sardinia, they are all nothing before you. That reminds me, at the Piazza del Campo[1C 18] in Siena, didn't you leave a huge crack there?"

"We, Well... You're right, but don't say it as though it has nothing to do with you. You were also responsible for all of those events..."

Godou looked at Erica resentfully, while the grandmasters all bowed their heads.

Finally, just like attendants serving a feudal lord, the others around quickly put in obsequiously,

"We now fully comprehend that it matters not whether someone chooses to act like a Lord or not, a Lord still remains a Lord. If and when you decide to grace Turin with your presence, I beg of you to be compassionate and forgiving——"

"We of the 'city of lilies', Florence, also entreat from you the same——"

"We, We at Rome too beseech and hope that you will see us in favor with you——"

Having witnessed this sight, and although he spent a long time cursing himself for his stupidity, he still managed to sleep extremely well.

But even in his dreams he continued to blame himself for doing something as stupid as that.

And returning back to the present, this morning, he took the day's newspaper from Anna, who had entered his room with Erica .

"Godou-san, this is amazing! A full twenty pages in this newspaper, just about the terrorist bombing of the Colosseum, the same number of pages as when Italy won the world cup!"

"The paper even says that there are clues to the terrorist organization that managed to get such a large amount of explosives. Ah, and there are even some organizations that are already claiming that it was them who did it."

The angelic Anna told him that news, while Erica too happily looked through the paper.

The newspaper which they brought wasn't the only one reporting that only one quarter of the Colosseum remained; even on the internet, news stations worldwide were also hurriedly publishing the event.

Godou grew even guiltier.

That said it was about time for him to catch his flight. Time to change the mood a little, and ask them to send him to the airport, but...

"What?! You're going back already? But it was so hard to get you to come here... You really don't want to spend time with me, right?"

"I'm telling you, I'm just a high school student. If I skip school, I'll never hear the end of it from my sister. I appreciate your sincerity, but let me off the hook this time."

Even though it was a Sunday morning here in Italy, it was already midnight back in Japan.

If he hurried up now and caught the plane, he could probably get back to Tokyo at around twelve in the afternoon. Every time he flew, it always ended up in such a rush...

"Ah, I just don't know how to deal with you. I'll send you to the airport, but I have to give you something before that."

Erica picked up the suitcase at her feet, and opened it.

Nestled inside was a carving about the size of his fist.

The material was probably polished obsidian, and the image on it was a really poor attempt at a human face, and tens of snakes around it.

The snakes seemed as though it was part of the person's hair.

Much of the sides were already blurred and indistinct, while the rock itself was also quite battered. It looked like an extremely old artifact.

"What's this? You want me to bring this back with me?"

"Yup, I told you before, this is the Gorgoneion—— an ancient representation of the Earth Mother. This thing is able to guide goddesses into becoming a [Heretical goddess] of the earth, it's a signpost, or to explain more simply, it's somewhat like a magic grimoire[1C 19]."

Having heard this, Godou shook his head.

"A grimoire? This isn't a book, it's a symbol set in stone. There aren't even any words on it, only a picture, right?"

"Forget paper, this is an object from a time even before writing was invented; but its use and concept is the same as a book's. That's why I called it a grimoire, because besides the most ancient goddesses, it has no meaning to anyone."

"The Gorgoneion. The Gorgon... Medusa[1C 20] ... right? I remember that she was a monster that Perseus defeated[1C 21], so is there a connection between them?"

Medusa – a woman born with snakes for hair, a beauteous demon found in Greek mythology.

Having seen the carving and discussed it, Godou naturally thought about her.

Erica smiled and nodded her head.

"That's right, but I have to correct that slightly, Medusa was also a real goddess in her own right."

"Eh? Is that so? ...That's not how I remembered it."

"No, you're not completely incorrect. In Greek myth, she is an evil monster, but behind that, she is an ancient mother goddess of the earth, with a long history, and she also has an intimate connection with many other ancient goddesses, the tripartite goddesses of the night[1C 22] ..."

It sounded like an extremely complicated explanation.

Godou nodded deeply, and then suddenly realized.

Because he was curious, he unconsciously got sucked into the explanation. This was Erica's plan all along!

"Erica! Stop! You don't need to explain any more. I've always kept theological knowledge at a safe distance, and I don't plan to make any extra preparation for anything. Please stop talking!"

"I believe that it's only a matter of time. In the end, Godou will still come personally to ask me for the information."

"That's never going to happen. It won't occur this time! And anyway, how can I bring such a dangerous thing back home? I'm sorry, but I can't accept this."

A carving of unknown origin, which he knew that a goddess was coveting.

If a dangerous monster appeared in Tokyo because he brought this back, Godou would certainly feel guilty about it.

Hearing Godou's refusal, Erica gave off a weak smile suggesting something like 'Oh, if that's what you want~~', then purposely drooped her head.

"Okay... well, then I can't force you. If the Gorgoneion continues to stay in this country, sooner or later a [Heretical god] will arrive here... But, we don't have a Lord to rely on, because when he fought with 'I don't know who', he suffered horrible injuries, and went to recuperate..."

A tragic sounding Erica was broken-heartedly muttering to herself.

Striking him where it hurts, Godou couldn't help but wince.

"Arianna, if a hostile god ever turns up, I swear upon my name to protect you —— But, I'm sorry. My strength could never defeat a god's. However, in order to let you live, I'll fight till I die!"

"You, you can't do that! Erica-sama, please don't say things like that! When the time comes, I'll fight by your side. I might not be much help, but I won't become a burden to you!"

"You're such a strong girl... May God bestow on you a fearless confidence! Ah ~~ but those helpless, weak citizens. Who knows what will happen to them...?"

Unaware that her Ojou-sama was currently playing the fool, Arianna responded seriously to her comments.

Godou's eyes weren't tricking him; Erica's gaze was definitely mischievous. She knew exactly what to do to make Godou feel guilty.

What a devious and malicious person!

After pondering for a long time on the dictates of compassion and honor as well as the proper treatment of the people living at Rome, Godou finally replied,

"...I get it. I'll bring that thing back with me— damn it, if a disaster happens because of it, how could I ever explain myself to the people of Tokyo!?"

"Don't worry, don't worry! Something like a city being razed to the ground, because a Lord decides to do something for fun, is already considered normal in Europe. If it happens in Tokyo, it'll have truly risen to the international level!"

"Stop spouting crap!"

Godou took the Gorgoneion, partially because he gave up arguing. Seeing this, Erica smiled wickedly.

'This woman is definitely a devil; she has to be my harbinger of doom and destruction.'

Godou once again confirmed his opinion of her.

_____

—— The Gorgoneion.

'The carving that depicts the [Serpent], containing the wisdom of three persons in one body, has fallen into enemy hands.'

Her feet stepping on the rubble of the Colosseum, her intuition told her; that was the case.

Traces of the Gorgoneion could still be felt there, and the traces of her enemy. The strength which destroyed this colossal stone arena was definitely that of a Campione's.

... The hundreds of people around her were all frantically conducting repairs.

But not one of them realized her presence.

Of course not.

She merely needed to think, 'I have no wish currently to recognize the chattering of mortals.' With just that, ordinary persons were unable to realize she was there.

Surveying the surrounding pitiful ruins, she recalled the Campione she met a few days ago.

The young devil from a faraway land.

And so it turns out that he was behind everything after all. Those disciples of Hermes — in mortal speech, they were called mages — were not sure what to do with the Gorgoneion, and so gave it to that Campione.

Since it had already been given to a foreigner, the [Serpent] had probably also followed him overseas.

"Well then..." She pondered for a moment.

Just like him, she had come from across the sea, seduced to this place.

If so, to cross the sea again, and head towards a foreign land; was there anything to fear in that?

The [Serpent] and her had an inseparable tie, and this same tie would send her towards it.

"The Gorgoneion which one seeketh, the carved aegis which one owned, the aching longing which one feelth- O serpent of old!"

She naturally began to sing an ancient ballad.

If it was to obtain the [Serpent], how could crossing the broad seas be considered suffering?

She focused her gaze far to the east, and began to walk forward.

"The Gorgoneion which one seeketh, O serpent, bestow upon thy heretical one that ancient power!"

She was a goddess with many names.

Both 'Gorgon' and 'Medusa' were all merely two names which she once held.

But the meanings of the names were the same, honorable titles which exalted the mother goddess, three deities in one form, who dominated the Mediterranean.

"The Gorgoneion which one seeketh. O ancient serpent, May thou lead thy down the path to the Heretical queen, and once again confer upon thy darkness, the wisdom of both earth and sky! "

The [Heretical goddess] faced a far off country.

Leisurely, patiently, she placed the first step on her journey to the east.

Chapter 3 – A Day in a Lord's Life

Part 1

Not far from the Kyu Shiba Rikyu Gardens and Tokyo Tower, next door to a five star restaurant and surrounded by a school, a television station, a broadcasting tower and an embassy, exist a surprising number of shrines and temples.

One of the districts has a small path winding through it.

Although the path closely follows the contours of the road next to it, the narrow route could be easily missed by anyone who didn't know it existed.

If one followed the confusing and mazelike path, you would somehow eventually end up in front of a flight of steps.

Totaling exactly 200 steps, it somehow felt a bit too long for something right in the heart of the city.

Having climbed the stone stairs, you would see Nanao Shrine[1D 1], which sat at the highest point.

Although, the surrounding wooded groves were certainly not as dense as a nature reserve; the temple, nestled between verdant vegetation, exuded a sense of calm and tranquility.

Inside the temple compound itself, not far from the ante-hall[1D 2], stood a small hut for changing and cosmetic purposes.

And inside one of the rooms, Mariya Yuri was dressing herself.

Wearing a kosode under a furisode and hakama[1D 3], she faced a mirror and combed her long, flowing hair.

Her hair seemed more coffee brown, than black, almost the color of black pearls. She did not dye her hair; it had been that color since birth. Yuri always felt somewhat inferior because of it, but she wasn't too concerned at the moment.

Yes, because the most important thing was that the comb she was running through her hair had snapped a tooth.

"… Most inauspicious, I pray nothing malign occurs."

She whispered silently an opinion without any logical basis.

It seemed as though it was an ill omen.

If she was a regular girl, she would probably forget what just happened immediately, but Yuri wasn't your regular maiden, and felt there was cause to investigate further.

Having finished dressing herself, Yuri exited the hut.

On her way to the ante-hall, she brushed past several clerics.

Facing their bowing and polite greetings, Yuri inclined her head in return. That this reverential manner was directed at a miko[1D 4], 15 years of age, had a reason, of course.

In this temple, Mariya Yuri had a more august and elevated position than anyone else.

"—— Oh, hime-miko[1D 5], nice to meet you! If you're free, want to chat for a while?"

These sudden, frivolous words were directed toward her.

Although he had spoken a respectful phrase such as 'hime-miko', his tone of voice had no hint of respect at all. He was playing the fool, like some clown that came out of nowhere.

The speaker slowly walked towards Yuri. Although he was wearing leather shoes, his feet made no sound at all treading on the fine gravel of the temple pathway.

Anyone who saw his manner of movement would realize that he was no ordinary person.

"… A pleasure to make your acquaintance. And who might you be?"

"Ah, I apologize for my rudeness. Perhaps it's too late to introduce myself, but my name is Amakasu. To see such an elegant hime-miko such as yourself is an honor for me. I hope we get along from this point forth."

Amakasu introduced himself as he held out a name card.

Yuri accepted the card, and gave it a glance.

His full name was Amakasu Touma, but what really attracted her attention was the title next to his name, stating the department he worked in.

"And what would bring a member of the History Compilation Committee to this place?"

Yuri asked suspiciously.

The sloppily dressed man wore a tattered, western suit; he was quite young, probably around twenty years of age, and didn't look very suave.

But one shouldn't judge a book by its cover. He was an envoy sent by the organization which controlled the magical side of the Japanese world. She had to remain serious and wary in her replies.

"A problem seems to have come up, something which could soon become the worst disaster our country has ever seen. It's somewhat of a thorny problem, and so we hope to add your considerable strength to our efforts; this is why I've come, I hope you understand my position in this."

"…This humble maiden has few abilities, and I fear that I will not be of any service."

"You are too humble. Although it is true that there are many Musashino mikos, those who are experts in analyzing spiritual energy, like you, are few. And besides, there are two additional reasons for selecting you."

Japan has always had spellcasters or spiritualists who passed down their skills.

Mariya Yuri was a descendant of one of them.

And as for the term 'Musashino' —— they were the organization of spiritualists who protected the Kanto region, bestowed the honorable title of [hime] from a very young age, and took on the greatest responsibilities given to any miko.

"As a Musashino Hime-miko, your task also comprises aiding the works of the History Compilation Committee. I'm sure you understand this? If you have any other questions, please leave them aside for the moment, and allow me to finish speaking."

"…Of course. And what is it you would have me do?"

"It would be a great help to us if you became more intimate with a Japanese youth, and also to confirm his true identity. His name is Kusanagi Godou, and the teenager whom we suspect to be a real Campione."

"A Campione?"

That was supposedly the title given to the greatest, most evil sorcerers and tyrants of Europe.

Having heard that dreadful title, Yuri's was rooted to the ground in shock.

—— A pair of eyes, blazing like that of a tiger.

The moment she heard the title, the first thing which came to mind was the aged demon's evil eyes.

"I'm sure you have already understood the first reason why we chose you. Since you've met Dejanstahl Voban in your childhood, you would probably be able to confirm whether the boy really is a Campione."

"… Yes. The 'Campione' you're referring to, is just like the appearance of vicious demons in Japanese myth, a reincarnation of a Rakshasa Raja[1D 6], they should be avoided at all costs. But it's hard for me to believe that. For a normal human to become a [King], doesn't he have to kill a god? —— To think that someone could actually do the unthinkable!"

That was something that happened five years ago; Yuri had once seen a Campione at close range, when she was in a certain small country in Eastern Europe.

Dejanstahl Voban.

Merely hearing this name would send European sorcerers to hurriedly cower in some corner, desperately muttering incantations to ward off evil.

Yuri would never, ever forget, those aquamarine pupils, which blazed like a tiger's in the dark.

She found out much later that, that particular devil had an ability which turned any living thing to dust with just a glance of his eyes, which only added to Yuri's fear of him.

"… I feel the same way, and so I too do not believe that Kusanagi Godou is a real Campione. Let me correct that; I do not want to believe it; although with all the evidence I've collated so far, it is extremely unclear."

Amakasu shrugged his shoulders.

"According to the report of the Greenwich Committee, in March this year, Kusanagi Godou defeated the Persian war god Verethragna on the island of Sardinia, and obtained the rights to the [Kingship]. After that, he travelled all over Italy, and each time he appeared in the city, huge amounts of destruction would occur. It is clear that there is a connection between them… Have you heard about the disturbance in Rome?"

"You mean even the terrorist attack on the Colosseum was…?"

"On the day which it happened, Kusanagi Godou arrived in Rome. The one who invited him was the supreme commander of the Knight corps [Copper Black Cross], the young Erica Blandelli. And when he returned to Japan, he seems to have brought back with him a holy relic of great antiquity…"

"A relic…"

Yuri was extremely concerned by what he just said.

The spiritual strength which she commanded as a hime-miko —— her extremely strong sixth sense and mind's eye was warning her, that she must not take it lightly, that it was an unhallowed object that would bring incomparable disaster.

"Concerning Kusanagi Godou, I would like to inquire more closely. Has he, like me, practiced some form of sorcery before? Or is he perhaps a master of some martial art?"

Yuri had decided to go through with this task with all her heart, and so she began to find out more.

Of course she was terrified of [tyrants], and if she could, she would stay far, far away. But if she did not force herself forward, thousands of people would suffer for it. If that was so, perhaps being chosen to do this was a sort of fate.

"If we're talking about sorcery or incantations, he seems to be completely useless, and the same too can be said in regards to martial arts. All things considered, forget about contesting with the gods, even his background had absolutely nothing to do with divinity —— well, have a look at this first."

Touma took a folder from his briefcase and handed it to Yuri.

She quickly glanced over the material inside.

It contained investigatory information concerning Kusanagi Godou. From his character, personal history, to his events at Italy and abilities as a Campione, all manner of details were placed in the report.

"…If I really wanted to find something abnormal about him, it would be that he was a reserve candidate for Japan, selected to participate in the international youth baseball championships. Apparently he was one of a handful of cleanups in the Kanto district when he was in junior high."

"I'm sorry, but what is this international youth baseball championships?"

"That's an American style baseball competition, mostly composed of junior high students. But I heard that when he was in

training camp for the championships, he injured his shoulder, and so pulled out."

"Is that so… I wanted to ask, why was he battling with a Persian deity in Sardinia? Surely even you must think the difference in location and god is strange."

"Concerning this, you should offer Alexander the Great a vote of thanks, because his concept of 'Brotherhood of Man' meant a melding of Greek and Persian races. This gave birth to Hellenistic culture, and gave a common ground to European and Near Eastern culture. This is, of course, far beyond what the average Japanese person thinks about on a daily basis."

Touma so explained with a wry smile.

"In Indian mythology, Verethragna is a god on par with Indra, and actually, under the reforms of Alexander, he was syncretized with the hero-god Heracles, and even given the Greek epithet Artagnes. After Alexander's death, supposedly a group of citizens under the command of Pompey were sent to settle in Sardinia. If one considers it with this knowledge, you can't say that there is no connection at all."

Yuri listened to his explanation while flipping through the folder.

At this point, she noticed a photo of a golden haired maiden clipped to a page… even Yuri, of the same gender, was awestruck by her beauty; it truly was a sight pleasing to the eyes.

"Ah, that girl is Erica Blandelli… she's been identified as Kusanagi Godou's lover, and supposedly she's an unrivalled genius at both swordsmanship and sorcery. I guess you could call her a model mage from a prestigious family."

"Lover!?"

Hearing such an immoral word, Yuri was left speechless.

"It's likely that [Copper Black Cross] realized the importance of Kusanagi Godou before everyone else, and sent her to insinuate herself with him. Even if they used their trump card, a natural born genius, the person still has to create an intimate relation with him. To use a girl for this strategy— I have to commend their thoroughness."

"To, to became a lover just because of that? That's way, way too shameless, way too immoral!! Something like this is completely wrong!! To sacrifice a woman's choice just to gain the power of a devil —— I will never accept it!"

Yuri stared angrily at the photo of Godou in the folder.

Although she was only a miko of little strength, she would never accept a tyrant such as this. Filled with rage and determination, her fear of the Campione incidentally also began to recede.

"…By the way, you did say that there were two reasons for selecting me. May I be privy to the other reason?"

"Of course, in fact, the second reason was something that seemed completely by chance…"

And having heard Touma's reply, Yuri couldn't help but feel some destiny working behind that amazing coincidence.

Who would've thought that at such an inconceivable place, Kusanagi Godou and she shared such a similar fate.

Part 2

It's already been a few days since he returned from Rome.

To be precise, half a week, and being a Thursday afternoon, Kusanagi Godou was currently enjoying his free time after school.

Having passed the school gates, he decided to take a somewhat roundabout journey home.

He'd finally managed to get past the jet lag, and his mood had brightened considerably —— but the minute his mind fell on the Gorgoneion which was resting in a cupboard at home, his mood fell correspondingly.

It should be said, that after he returned to Japan, Godou tried multiple times to destroy that engraving.

But it only ended up being a waste of time.

Having wasted half a day sweating and thinking about it, none of what he tried left even a scratch.

Godou recalled the parting words Erica left him with.

—— 'It may look like a stone, but yet is not a stone. What it is, is a record of the accumulated wisdom of countless godheads. And so it will never wear away, and certainly cannot be destroyed.'

As he once again cursed the idiotic reality that now surrounded his life, his feet kept on towards his home.

The Kusanagi family lived at the edge of Bunkyo ward in Tokyo .

Amongst the many shops that were near a subway station; situated at a corner, was a second hand bookstore that had closed down.

This was the Kusanagi residence. After the death of the shop owner, Godou's grandmother, four years ago, it slowly began to run out of business, and eventually closed for good.

And anyway, when compared to the days when the shop would open and close without a single customer, nothing had really changed.

Especially when one considered there was nothing even approaching a 'manga section' in the store, it was hardly surprising that the bookstore couldn't keep up with the newer shops. Perhaps the store might have survived if it was in Jinbocho[1D 7], but being in a small alleyway, it would have been more unusual if business was any better.

Since four years ago, the Kusanagi family never bothered to restart the store.

And since we're on the topic, the road on which the bookstore was situated, Sanchoume Street, Nazu station, still retains to this day a certain air of an older, downtown Tokyo.

Although Godou didn't think of it like that, having always lived in the area, many other people said it was like so. Indeed, ancient architecture such as this – a shop-cum-residence, exuding a Showa period feel – filled the street.

It was completely different from the streets of Rome, fresh in his memory.

The streetscapes there had few modern high-rise buildings and convenience stores; preserving its original looks, and the whole scene, with all the buildings around, was one of rich gothic grandeur.

Hence the residents there almost seemed like visitors from another city, filled with an imposed sense of vitality.

"Onii-chan, welcome home… though it's really rare for you to get home so early."

Suddenly a voice was heard from behind, addressing him.

Without looking at the source, he already knew who it was; after all, he had already lived with the speaker for more than ten years.

"Shizuka, isn't that really unfair? I've been getting home quite early for these past few days and yet you make it sound as though I stay out on purpose…"

"That's true, but only for the past few days. Last Saturday, you left home early in the morning, and didn't come home till Sunday evening. And then, you even skipped school on Monday. Where did you go, and what were you doing?"

His sister was glaring at him discontentedly.

Kusanagi Shizuka, fourteen years old, a third year middle school student. Coincidentally, she was one year younger than Godou.

Unlike Godou, she wasn't wearing a school uniform.

Both her hands held reusable shopping bags, and were filled with vegetables, milk, fish and other groceries. She probably got home earlier and changed, then went out to buy ingredients for dinner and only caught up with him.

"I already told you, I only went to a friend's house for a night… How many times do I have to repeat that?"

Ever since he returned from Italy on the Sunday, Godou had been repeating that same reply.

Beginning to feel somewhat bound by his response, he nevertheless answered with the same flimsy excuse.

… Although, it probably wasn't right to praise his own sister, it had to be said that Shizuka really had an extremely cute face.

But although she was the younger sister, she constantly used that aggravating manner on her brother; it felt more like a mother-son relationship, being constantly nagged; certainly, a most problematic existence for him.

"It's a friend, is it?... A friend… I see… oh…"

"If you've got something to say, say it. I don't like all this twisting and turning around."

Godou spoke while taking the shopping bags from Shizuka.

He didn't really think about it, but acted almost subconsciously in reaching out his hand. He was probably too well conditioned by his grandpa's own habits. Habits really are frightening.

But Shizuka still glared at her brother with suspicious eyes.

"So let me ask, this so called friend of yours, is it a boy or a girl? "

"…Of course it's a boy."

And now, would his big fat lie be taken as the truth?

Walking down the hallway next to Shizuka, Godou desperately tried to maintain a casual demeanor, but this sister of his merely glanced at him – coincidentally praying to any god he could think of right now – and dropped the next bombshell.

"Oh, I see. And on another topic, what is Erica-san like?"

"_____!?"

Godou gaped. 'How does Shizuka know that name!?' flashed in his mind.

"O, oh, you mean that Erica… yes, well, how should I put it——"

"I never mentioned it, but actually, after Onii-chan disappeared on Saturday, this girl called our house."

Her words were cold as ice, and her eyes looked like a hunter about to shoot her prey.

_____

Last week, the phone rang in the Kusanagi house.

After Shizuka picked it up, the caller told her that her name was Erica, and formally introduced herself.

She said that because there was some pressing business which required her brother's help, she decided to request him to deal with it. She also said that it might take a few days, and there was no need to worry about anything…

———————————

"Her voice was so pleasant, I'm sure the person herself was also very pleasant to the eyes? Wouldn't you agree, Onii-chan? And how old is she? And let's make it clear now, please don't try to fool me by saying Erica is a guy now — that's just stupid."

Shizuka spoke frostily, cutting off his only escape route at the same time.

'That's why all these girls are so…!'

Godou couldn't help but curse Erica and his sister.

Erica deciding to phone his house was definitely due to some malicious reason. Most likely, she thought that causing an uproar in the Kusanagi household was an extremely funny thing to do.

But Godou would never have known that Shizuka was also a fan of this sort of thing…

'Forget Erica, my sister is also way too scary…'

So for these past few days, she already knew the truth of what he was doing. Yet she didn't confront him immediately about it, and even made him think he was safe by waiting a few days!

"It's because you did something which you couldn't tell anyone — that forced you to lie, right? I can't believe that Grandpa actually managed to guess what you were doing. I'm so disappointed… I never thought Onii-chan dared to do something like that."

"Wha, What's 'that' thing which Gramps talked about!?"

"Something along the lines of 'If a boy runs off to find a girl without telling anyone, there has to be something sneaky and underhanded going on. And on that note, I also had a period in my life like that…' and so on. I can't believe you, Onii-chan! I thought you were a better person than this! Why? An illicit love affair? A one-sided romance? Or could it be a forbidden relationship with an older, sensuous school teacher… whatever it is, it's got to be something like that, right!?"

Shizuka interrogated poor Godou, triumph in her eyes.

Godou was desperately shaking his head to deny it.

"I'm not Gramps! I'd never do anything risqué like that!"

"Hmph! You're Grandpa's only grandson, right? Even your faces look similar; perhaps you just suddenly realized a new part of your genetic makeup, and unlocked Grandpa's female interaction abilities. Something like that could really happen!"

"How does that even work! Gramps' affinity with the opposite sex doesn't even have anything to do with DNA. It's all about a person's personality, just because I'm his grandson doesn't mean you can lump the two of us together!"

'Why do I have to act out this stupid brother-sister argument in front of our house, right in the middle of a street lined with shops?'

All those gazes were piercing all over Godou's body.

Shizuka also grew embarrassed from the silence, and quickly lowered her voice.

"…So why would you lie to me then? If there is no immoral reason behind it, wouldn't it be better to just tell me the truth?"

"It's precisely because I was afraid things would get complicated like this that I did it. You could say that I became friends with that Erica because of my bad luck— and I did actually go visit her, but there were other friends as well. We definitely don't have any kind of immoral relationship… Do you believe me now?"

Godou rested a hand on his sister's head, and ruffled her hair to try and make her feel better.

Shizuka had a very troubled expression on her face, but she finally sighed and accepted it.

"It's not like I don't believe you… but you're not allowed to lie to me again, okay? Even if you try to trick me, I can tell you're

lying just by your normal attitude and actions around the house, understand?"

"Alright, so let us just leave it as that, OK?"

Now that the matter was settled, Shizuka gave a somewhat embarrassed smile. If she had that sort of expression most of the time, Godou felt that he could brag that he had an honest and cute little sister.

Contemplating this, Godou smiled wryly.

"It's all because Onii-chan used to be part of the baseball team, and always came home really late — even on Saturdays, you'd be out training from morning to night. Don't you want to join a sports club in high school?"

"… I don't really feel like it right now, I think I'll relax and play around for a while longer."

Because the conversation suddenly shifted to a completely new topic, Godou was at loss as to how to make a cogent reply.

To tell the truth, he was very unsure as to how he should answer that question. He just wasn't sure if he could hide the truth well enough.

Obviously, it wasn't good enough. Shizuka concernedly gazed at her brother.

"Your shoulder… does it still hurt? Umm, even though someone who isn't athletic like me probably shouldn't say this, maybe you

can still be a striker even with a hurt shoulder —— Oh, I said something hurtful… I'm sorry, Onii-chan."

Shizuka stopped halfway through her sentence.

'… No matter how I look at it, this girl really is my sister' – Godou unashamedly thought.

Although she looked as though she was a very tactful person, the moment something touchy came up she would say something insensitive – did she have to be like her brother even in little things like this?

"Well, I can't deny you are a little bit too nosy. It's just that I don't feel right in the whole upper and under-classmen relationship that develops in the sport teams, so it doesn't matter if it's the baseball team or not, I don't feel like joining any of them."

Godou gently ruffled his sister's hair again.

Although Shizuka wasn't sure how much she heard was the truth, she simply nodded her head unhappily. Perhaps this sister really was just smarter than her brother; at least she knew when not to say anything unnecessary.

—— However, there was something else that even Shizuka hadn't realized.

That is, after becoming a Campione, the left shoulder, which could only weakly throw a baseball, had already healed and recovered its strength. Of course, it was all due to the incredible healing powers he had now obtained.

When Godou entered high school, he gave up baseball for this reason.

But the reason he didn't start the sport again was for a different reason. Because he now had a supernatural strength and endurance, it was simply a major breach of the sportsmen's ethics.

And the baseball team in his school was also the one which always lost badly in the first round of the inter-district championships.

Although he sometimes still envied his fellow baseball players who continued to chase after that small white ball, if Godou wanted to enter that pathetic team, he would probably not be allowed.

But when one compared that loss to his new chance at life, this little sacrifice was completely acceptable. At least, that was how Godou tried to see it.

Part 3

Godou and Shizuka reached home at around six in the evening.

Because it used to be a bookstore, the front door was a sliding glass door.

The house – a relic from before the Second World War – was a two story wooden building.

Although old, it had been renovated and extended three times, and it could be considered a comfortable home.

The siblings entered the house together, and their eager grandfather greeted them.

"Oh? It's rare for both of you to come home together, isn't it?"

Their grandfather, currently reading an old book from a shelf – Kusanagi Ichirou said.

As said before, this was until recently a bookstore, and so rows of bookshelves laden with old books and works that didn't manage to sell at the shop's last day of business still filled the room. As such, the attic was now crammed with many, many books.

But returning to the main point——

Their grandfather, standing inside what was once the old store, looked exactly the same as usual.

He was always dressed immaculately, both his speech and actions filled with confidence and steadiness. Despite being over seventy, he still exuded a strong sense of charisma; he was so much a refined gentleman it was spooky.

Godou's grandfather had taken care of him in place of his busy, working mother for as long as he could remember.

All the housework he did was careful and practised, and he would cook everyday.

If he just thought about it in that sense, there was no problem, but…

"Shizuka, could you possibly have drawn in your net, and trapped Godou so that he had to tell the truth? So, what was it?"

"Well, seems like it's more complicated than we thought. Onii-chan still insists that they are 'just friends', and so from today onwards I'll pay careful attention to see whether or not he's lying. We'll know the truth eventually."

"You two, please stop talking sneakily like that in front of me."

Someone who could grasp the whole conversation just by glancing at his grandson and granddaughter's expressions – that was his dangerous grandfather.

Someone who could openly say in conversation that she didn't trust her brother – that was his aggressive little sister.

And including his currently absent mother – and not forgetting his divorced father, now living far away – that made up the five members of Godou's family.

"But Shizuka, you shouldn't over do it either. I used to be just like him — a boy of Godou's age staying away from home for a number of days isn't that strange, so don't worry too much."

"Shizuka, don't listen to Gramps — I'm nothing like him! Remember when he was a student? He actually dared to build relationships with a widow and a geisha, and even slept over at their place – he didn't even go to school for two weeks. I would never do anything like that!"

Godou shouted out loud, while enduring his grandfather's sympathetic but understanding gaze.

Sadly, what he said was hardly believable.

"Where did you hear those rumours from? Let me tell you, when I was a student, I was very engaged with my studies. Shizuka, don't feel obliged to accept something so blatantly false."

His grandfather grinned, while glossing over Godou's accusation with a toss of his head.

Kusanagi Ichirou – in his youth, he was apparently a wanton and dissolute playboy.

And even at his current age, he was still able to project the same attitude. It must be an ingrained habit.

When Godou had heard about his grandfather's 'exploits', something immediately came to mind – 'I see, if he led such an amoral life in his youth, it's not surprising that he is now such an unrestrained old man.'

"Alright, since Shizuka has bought the ingredients, I'll start preparing dinner. Could both of you help me?"

Typical of his grandfather's suave attitude, he smoothly diverted the topic once again.

When it came to interpersonal relationships, you couldn't deny he was almost psychic about it.

And because Shizuka also knew this, she didn't bother nagging her grandfather – she knew the level of ability between them was just too great – and so in recompense, she was very hard on her brother.

'I wish I had just half of Gramps' attitude. Then I wouldn't lose to my sister and Erica…'

Sometimes, Godou was simply envious about the things he didn't have.

The table in the dining room was filled with that night's dinner.

Roasted rock cod, stewed octopus and radishes, and fresh salad with home made dressing, to be eaten with rice and miso soup. Certainly an accurate representation of a Japanese meal.

You could say that the chef who prepared their meals was something of a gourmand, and so his dishes were all well made.

Tasting some of his radish and celery miso soup – it was up to his usual standard. The smooth and tangy taste was just perfect.

"Eh? Grandpa, did you pickle these vegetables yourself?"

"How nostalgic — Gran always used to make it herself too."

Heaped onto a small dish were salt and rice bran carrot pickles.

The siblings both picked up their chopsticks, and tried a piece. It was, as they say, delicious.

As mentioned before, these weren't store bought pickles, and definitely looked home made. But they knew their grandfather was never very good at pickling.

"Ah, it was given to me by Mrs. Sakuraba, the lady who owns the liquor shop. It's tasty, isn't it?"

The old man didn't even bother to hide it.

But after hearing his words, both Godou and Shizuka looked at each other worriedly. It was inevitable now; from tomorrow onwards there would be a series of escalating battles between jealous women.

It has already been quite a few years since their grandmother died.

They weren't sure when it started, but for those ladies at the shopping district who wanted to become more intimate with a now single grandfather, all competed to send all sorts of things to him.

All of them were either housewives with their own families, or older grannies.

If they – that is, Mrs. Murakawa who owned the pancake shop, Mrs. Endou who sold toys down the road, Mrs. Yamanoi who owned the hardware store, and all the rest – found out that Mrs. Sakuraba had given them pickles, everyone of them would competitively send a dish they made themselves.

If one looked at it as having good neighbourly feelings, there was nothing better than this.

But all those ladies always looked at their grandfather with emotional gazes. For the sake of peace in this shopping alley, both Godou and Shizuka prayed that their grandfather would control himself a little better…

However, there was no point in worrying about it now.

The siblings shook their heads and turned their eyes onto the bounteous meal in front of them, with a lightning speed of both chopsticks and mouths, each dish on the table was thus quickly finished.

Just as all the plates were cleaned, and everyone was preparing to clear the table…

The phone placed in the living room suddenly rang.

"I'll grab the phone ~~ Hello, this is the Kusanagi residence, may I ask who you're looking for?"

Shizuka looked at Godou and his grandfather, whose hands were full of soap and crockery, and then turned to answer the call.

"Ma, Mariya-senpai? Is there anything you need? Why would you specially take the time to call us…"

Seems like it was someone Shizuka knew.

She was still on the phone when Godou finished the washing and entered the dining room.

"Ye, Yes, He is home right now… But why would senpai be looking for Onii-chan? I thought you were in different classes? Ah, no, please don't say that! I, I understand. I'll make sure to tell him that. Yes, alright. Plea, Please have a delightful evening…"

'Please have a delightful evening?!' Godou began to feel very uneasy.

Since she mentioned 'onii-chan' earlier, they must have been talking about him. That was strange enough, but even more worrying was the formal good bye at the end. Just who was Shizuka talking to?

"… Onii-chan, please sit down there."

"But I'm sitting down already. Shizuka, what are you talking about?"

Godou asked his sister, who was pointing at the tatami mat in front of him.

Since he was already sitting cross legged, it was naturally he would ask this.

"I want you to get down and kneel properly! I'm going to ask you a question, and you'd better answer me truthfully —— Onii-chan, when did your relationship with Mariya-senpai become so close?"

"Huh?"

Shizuka – who, by the way, did force her brother to kneel – flung out a completely random question at him.

"Who? I mean, who is she? I don't think I know anyone by that name."

"Are you really telling the truth? …Well, I'll go on for now, we can continue that part of the interrogation later."

My dear sister… the way you casually talk about 'interrogation' is way too frightening.

"Onii-chan, do you know who the most beautiful person in your high school is?"

"I don't… know? Something like that isn't that important anyway. Beauty isn't something you should go around ranking people by."

"You're right, but on our campus, there's someone who's so superior there's no need to compare with anyone else to make a verdict… and that's Mariya Yuri-senpai."

Godou and Shizuka were studying at the same institution – Jounan College had both a high- and middle-school division.

Both portions were on the same campus, and so the two siblings often walked to school together.

The walk would take about twenty minutes, which was very convenient.

But Godou was originally studying at a normal, state middle-school. At his high-school entrance examination, he was lucky to make it into Jounan, and began studying there at the start of this spring. In contrast, his sister Shizuka had been studying at the college ever since the beginning of her junior-high years, and so naturally had been studying there for much longer, and understood more about things and people at school.

"She's my senpai from the tea ceremony club, and is also a first year student like you in high-school. She was well known as a beauty ever since she began in junior-high, and also extremely smart; she is always ranked in the top five each year."

When she said that, Godou vaguely recalled that his sister was a member of the tea ceremony club.

Apparently at Jounan College, it was quite common for both junior and senior high school students to join and participate in the same clubs.

And so, if this 'Mariya Yuri' was both a senior from the same club, and an acquaintance since junior-high, there was nothing strange for her to be calling her. So why did he have to kneel here?!

"And so? What did this Mariya-san say?"

Godou asked with a tinge of asperity. He had no idea how her phone call had anything to do with his current predicament.

He vaguely recalled hearing the girl's name before.

More often than not, it came from the mouths of the boys of his class, but the topic was apparently popular even amongst the girls; saying that she was cute and other things of that sort.

"Alright, I'll get to the main issue. Mariya-senpai, although she thought it was too presumptious of her, would like to meet and chat with you, onii-chan… And Mariya-senpai is not only beautiful, but very intelligent, and also an ojou-sama."

"…Does that have anything to do with her invitation?"

"Of course it does! Onii-chan, could you possibly have taken advantage of the fact that she was an innocent, pure maiden, and so smooth talked, lied and then played around with her?!"

Hearing Shizuka accuse him of so many strange things, Godou instantly retorted:

"How could I have done something like that to someone whom I just put a name to?!"

"So then why did she call our house, and ask to meet you, Onii-chan? That's just too suspicious!"

Even Godou couldn't deny the truth in what she just pointed out.

"But there's something weird about that. If she wanted to find me, isn't it just as strange that she asked you to deliver the message ? Since she called, wouldn't she just talk to me directly."

"Maybe it just didn't occur to her? After all, she's a true ojou-sama. Although senpai is very smart, she doesn't usually think about efficiency— and besides, she probably felt nervous talking to a boy over the phone— The point is, senpai is really amazing— when she says goodbye, she can even say 'I hope for your continued well-being' completely naturally."

"…This Mariya-san, does she live in the Twelfth century?"

Amongst the girls that Godou knew personally, no one would greet people that way.

However, the girls around Erica were a definite possibility.

No matter how you put it, it was undeniable that she was a precious daughter of the Blandelli family. She didn't have to try; if she thought about it, she could emanate the whole 'ojou-sama' attitude in waves.

"She's not outdated, just a descendant of an ancient and noble family. Comparing our Kusanagi name to their family, we're just commoners. There's no connection between us at all…"

"And now I'm getting even more confused— why would she want to look for me? Maybe she found the wrong person?"

The more Godou heard about it, the more he came to believe that she was from 'the other side'.

Apart from the sorcerers whom he befriended in Italy, Godou's relationships were all completely normal and even boring. He just couldn't remember what he could have done to come to the attention of a lofty princess like Mariya.

However, Shizuka just coldly glared at Godou and said,

"…Is that so? Recently all of Onii-chan's actions are suspicious. For example, just like the matter about Erica-san."

"…I already said, she's just a normal friend."

"Oh, that's right. Mariya-senpai also said… she wants to see the thing you brought back recently. What is she talking about?"

Having heard that, all the questions he had were answered.

Other than the Gorgoneion, Godou couldn't think of anything else.

—— So that was it. If she had something to do with those mages , it wasn't strange no matter how outdated you sounded; actually you could probably say it was the natural course of things.

Godou finally realised. Even though he had just returned home, he had already been flung into another complicated situation. He just became depressed again.

Chapter 4 – Enemy from Afar

Part 1

The minute Godou stepped off Shobakouen Station, he went looking for a map. That is, the 'YOU-ARE-HERE' sort that decorated the front of any passenger stop.

After the phone call yesterday, he found out the location for their meeting; it was quite possibly the most obscure Shinto shrine ever. At least, he had never heard it.

Although he had already made sure to know the closest bus stop and the walking route, it would probably still take him a long time to actually reach the shrine, it was that remote.

After confirming his destination again on the large map, Godou again set off.

———————————

"Why a shrine? There are so many better places to meet… And since we even study at the same school, couldn't she just meet me at school?"

"Now that you mention it, I remember someone saying that she was working at a shrine somewhere as a miko. And that she wasn't doing it for money, but to gain some life experience in the ' real world'. So… maybe that's why she likes shrines so much?"

Last night, the brother and sister pair was considering the strange request.

After Shizuka told him that, Godou's worries grew exponentially.

"Okay then, let's decide what you'll do tomorrow. Onii-chan, when do you plan on visiting? How about straight after school?"

"…Why are you arranging my schedule? I can decide by myself, thank you."

"Because Onii-chan is a boorish and insensitive boy, I can't let you go and meet a naïve and pure Ojou-sama, can I? So I'm going to go with you."

"That's enough, Shizuka— I'm not a primary schooler anymore, I don't need a chaperone."

"Hmm… What's wrong with me coming along with you? So, you're going to do questionable things to Mariya-sempai after all ——"

After a long and painful conversation, Godou finally persuaded the adamant Shizuka not to tag along.

———————————————

In the end, Godou decided to first return home and change into casual clothes, then went alone to the meeting place. Of course, he also brought the Gorgoneion with him in a bag.

Perhaps that thing was even more dangerous than he imagined?

The reason why this Mariya wanted to talk outside school, was perhaps so that the other students would not get involved by accident… This was definitely not due to a sense of paranoia.

Godou felt justified in the end… He should never have let Erica force that bloody thing on him!

He once again felt a huge sense of regret as he walked on. Eventually, he arrived at the shrine entrance.

This long, arduous flight of stone stairs was his last obstacle.

Somewhat tired, he began his assault of the steps, and finally reached his destination —— Nanao Shrine.

Passing under the torii[TE 1], he entered the temple grounds.

The person who came out to greet him was a girl dressed in miko garments.

"We are immensely touched by your arrival to this humble shrine, Kusanagi Godou-sama. Your very presence is an honor to us. May you forgive me my insolence, in begging a respected, noble Campione such as yourself to step into this place."

The miko bent into a deep bow.

The brilliant contrast of a scarlet hakama and furisode worn over her white kosode dazzled and stupefied him. When she rose

from her bow, Godou immediately understood why Shizuka constantly used 'amazing' to describe her.

"My name is Mariya Yuri. Concerning the phone call last evening to your honored person, I must sincerely apologize."

Her dark brown hair swayed as she moved.

Mariya Yuri – truly, she was as beautiful as the rumors said. And it wasn't just beauty; her face projected an air of refined nobility, her eyes shone with clear intelligence.

Of all the people Godou knew, Erica Blandelli was pre-eminent in her looks.

However, the maiden Mariya in front of him was certainly an equal.

If one considered Erica to be a large Camellia flower, this outstandingly well-mannered Ojou-sama would be a blooming sakura blossom, attracting the affection of others.

"You're also one of those sorcerers, aren't you? Just like the ones in Europe— but I have to say this is the first time I've met you guys in Japan."

"That is correct… Although I do not wish you to equate us with them, there is no severe difference between us two. I am assigned to this shrine, serving as a miko protecting Musashino, and although it is nothing more than superficial knowledge, I do know some magic."

In other words, she is working at this shrine after all.

Godou nodded his head and looked around.

"Err… Is Mariya-san the only one here? Is there anyone else?"

If possible, he would really prefer if there were other people present.

As far as Godou was concerned, it was far too difficult to be alone with such a beautiful girl.

"Your Lordship is most perceptive— I am currently the sole person at the place— and in like fashion, if I offend your honored person for any reason, it will only be me that is to be blamed. I beg your Lordship to forgive the inadequacies of my humble service, and assuage your dread rage on my body alone ——"

"…Umm, Mariya-san? Somehow, what you just said seems a bit strange?"

"My only wish is for a tyrant such as you to appease your anger with my death. I beg of you, please do not torture and execute hapless citizens at your pleasure. The display of compassion and tolerance is the only paragon for the noble Lord; whatever previous mistakes they have made, I am willing to suffer the punishment alone."

Yuri thus declared in a respectful fashion.

…Could this possibly be words of advice? Wasn't it just like the scenes in period dramas[1E 2], where a loyal minister is willing to die so that his tyrannical or muddle-headed King can be persuaded?

Godou suddenly realized things took a turn for the worse, and hurriedly corrected Yuri:

"There are too many things to correct in what you said, but let's start with the first one— What sort of person do you think I am? I'm not Nero[1E 3], not Dong Zhuo[1E 4] and definitely not Oda Nobunaga[1E 5], I'm not going to kill anyone!"

"…So you mean that simply killing isn't enough to satisfy you?"

The beautiful hime-miko once again said something completely whacked out with a serious expression.

Why did things turn out like this?

This girl looked calm and intelligent, yet couldn't understand a word of what Godou said. She really was a high-born lady; her way of thinking truly was different from everyone else.

"That's not what I meant. Listen carefully; I'm a civilized person, and don't take pleasure in doing those sort of tyrannical deeds. I hope you understand what I mean by this."

"…Yes, I understand completely. However you wish to toy or violate me, I'm willing to acquiesce to my Lord's wishes. Your meaning was that you will not allow a quick death, isn't it?"

"You didn't understand at all! I really don't have some strange fetish of torturing girls!"

Godou suddenly realized something felt wrong.

Even if she was a sorcerer, very few people actually knew he was a Campione.

The grandmasters he met a few days ago in Rome were the same. Until he had dueled with Erica and displayed his strength, they all were suspicious about his claims to the contrary.

"How do you know that I am a Campione?"

"Because of my ability, these eyes of mine are clairvoyant, able to read the secrets of the spiritual plane. Once, long ago, I had the fate of meeting a compatriot of yours, the Marquis Voban. Hence I will never mistake a Campione – a Rakshasa Raja."

Yuri's words were filled with self-confidence.

Godou finally understood. So this girl had actually once met the legendary Devil King of Eastern Europe!

"Is, is that so— I've also heard his name before. He puts on an antiquated, tyrannical attitude, and is a stubborn and temperamental old man, right? I think he is the only Campione that acts like that, so please don't treat me the same way."

Godou himself knew another Campione.

He was an incorrigibly hopeless fellow.

On the surface, he looked like an open and carefree Latin knight ; but he was capable of smiling broadly while seriously hacking at you with a sword. He was definitely not normal, but it had to be said that he was very good at dealing with people.

"Your Lordship is too humble. I am most clear as to your deeds at Sicily, Milan and Rome, done in rage; all those scenes of destruction could be nothing but the deeds of a Campione. Truly dreadful…"

"It, it's not like that, I really didn't do it because I got mad. Anyway, Mariya-san, can you please stop speaking so formally? We're classmates at school, so it's fine to simply talk casually— and I'll do the same."

To be addressed so respectfully by a girl for so long, Godou simply felt very uncomfortable. But Mariya looked flabbergasted at his suggestions.

"I am extremely sorry; it is because my speech fails to match my meaning. I am most apologetic… However, what is the meaning of 'simply talk casually'?"

What the…? Was it possible that in the world of princesses and high-born maidens, there was no 'normal' way of talking?

Godou realized just how different their lives and worlds were from each other.

"I mean, stop using that respectful tone of voice. I'll just call you Mariya, and you can just address me by my name. I don't care if it's Kusanagi, or Godou, or you can even make up some nickname — anything is fine."

"How can I… I'm sorry, I can't do it. After all, your Lordship's station and mine are so different, and besides, I have never directly addressed a boy by name."

Yuri blushed and declined.

Godou only grew more certain that the two probably didn't even come from the same country.

"My station… who uses that word today? And I'm not some amazing person anyway. Forget it, if you're not comfortable with it I won't force you to— but please just relax when you're talking. And please, please stop calling me 'your Lordship'."

"Yes… I will make an effort… Kusanagi…-san."

Watching Yuri paying careful attention to her words, Godou nodded his head.

That was a hundred times better than seeing a girl his age calling him 'your Lordship'.

"I have something I would like to request of you, Kusanagi…-san. Could I please borrow the divine object you brought from Rome to look at it?"

Yuri recovered her serious manner and requested.

"I have no problem with that, but how do you know about that thing?"

"Kusanagi-san, you are too humble. Someone who could be a Campione went to the country of origin for all sorcery – Europe. To their colleagues in Japan, rather than saying that they are interested in what you obtained, it is probably more correct to say they were worried. That, of course, is natural."

"Worried… have I been watched all this time?"

Godou was genuinely concerned.

He never suspected that such a group existed.

"I don't know if they were actively trailing you, but I can at least confirm that there were Japanese investigators sent to Rome. According to the reports from the investigation, after they found out that the Italian mages pressed a certain object onto you; they sent their files to us."

"And who sent the investigators?"

"Of course it would be the History Compilation Committee… do you not know them?"

An extremely long title emerged from Yuri's lips.

That said, Godou recalled that he had heard it somewhere before. Godou recalled the event from the murky depths of his memory.

Erica did mention before that all mages across Europe were in hiding, and although he felt that was simply absurd, there was also a sense of awe.

She also said that Japan would certainly also have its own mages' associations.

The difference was that, unlike Europe, because mages in Japan were organized, monitored and directed closely by the government, the average citizen simply didn't know of their existence.

The name of that association, if he remembered correctly, was…

"The History Compilation Committee, yes, I've heard of them before."

"They are a secret organization, controlling and manipulating gathered information by means of mages and spiritualists. It comprises the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and

Technology, the National Diet Library, the Imperial Household Agency, the Religious Affairs Agency, the Metropolitan Police department among other influential organizations. People like me, miko with spiritual ability or agents of the gods, have been pressed into aiding their efforts."

Magic, Sorcery, Divine Aid —— infinite numbers of strange powers and confusing abilities.

All these matters are not considered part of 'proper history' in Japan.

The Committee was founded in order to preserve the desired attitude amongst the population, and thus became the 'History Compilation Committee'. At least, that was how Erica explained it.

"It was also on the Committee's orders that I meet you here today, Kusanagi-san — so that I could confirm whether you really were a Campione. It was also because we study at the same school, and that I am good friends with Shizuka."

"You're also a victim, huh…"

Having heard this, Godou began to sympathize with Yuri.

Perhaps it was because of the impression he received from the carefree attitude of the Latin mages, he felt that Yuri, who was filled with custom, to be a pitiable sight. For this, if nothing else, he should maintain a positive relationship with the Committee.

Having decided on this, Godou took out the Gorgoneion from his bag.

A crest on a dull black rock, the engraving of a woman with snakes for hair —— the moment Yuri saw it, she was so stunned she couldn't say anything.

"So this thing really is very dangerous, huh?"

"I'm afraid so— it has a very, very ancient seal of a godhead impressed therein. A serpent god, the mark of the great serpent… No, it likely has an even older root, the helix seal of the encircling Earth Mother ——"

Yuri closed her eyes and said this.

"Although it is only my intuition, I believe this seal came from North Africa. Egypt, Numidia[1E 6]… I'm not sure why, but my heart tells me those countries are most likely."

"Your heart tells you? A friend of mine calls this the Gorgoneion , do you know about it, Mariya?"

"No— I know almost nothing about the gods of Europa or Africa. I only relied on my clairvoyance and intuition to somewhat 'feel' it out, and then said it."

But what she just said was exactly the same as what Erica divulged.

Godou was deeply impressed.

Whatever it was, Mariya's spiritual ability was definitely an extremely accurate intuition.

Of course, she could simply be telling a big, fat lie, but Godou wasn't prepared to doubt the girl, who was speaking so solemnly and with such a sincere gaze.

—— Although the mention of Africa was certainly startling.

The Gorgons, Medusa etcetera – weren't they Greek myths? Well, the hero Perseus did save a gorgeous beauty called Andromeda, and she was said to be a princess of Ethiopia. So what she said did make sense…

"Kusanagi-san, I'd like to ask you a question."

Godou, who had sunk into a deep pondering, was suddenly jerked out by Yuri's sudden question.

"This is obviously a tool for a [Heretic God]— as a Campione, there is no way you could have not noticed it, is that correct?"

"Well, you're correct. Yes… This thing is something troublesome after all…"

"If you knew that, why bring it here! Do you want to invite some apocalyptic god into Tokyo! What do you take the safety of this country's citizens for?!"

A sudden ringing voice, out of the blue.

Just as he was nodding, a thunderbolt like declaration struck him.

Godou once again closely examined Yuri – her confident beauty , until just now still most virtuous in composure and elegance, yet now so alluring in her daring.

She was awe-inspiring, and Godou subconsciously drew back.

"Well, I, err, was also worried about this, but there should be no problem, right? The goddess who wants this thing is all the way back there. For her, I think that she probably doesn't even know the name and place called Japan."

"'There should be no problem?'… Please do not create unnecessary dangers for us. Having read your investigatory report , I immediately realized that Kusanagi-san is extremely uncaring about other people and their property."

Yuri bored through him with a chilling gaze, and Godou stepped back two paces.

This was bad.

Any argument with her was going to end terribly for him.

Godou knew by instinct that his personality was quite possibly the worst match with hers —— to Godou, she was a completely different sort of 'ultimate boss' from Erica!

Yuri may have also discovered this same thing…

Now her previous 'advice' was becoming more like an all-out attack!

"With great power comes great responsibility. And because of this, don't you think that you're being very irresponsible, Kusanagi-san? Unable to withstand your lover's request, you brought this unknown, dangerous object back to Japan ——"

"Lover? Wha, Who are you referring to?"

"There's no use acting dumb, this investigatory folio states it very plainly."

Yuri said while taking out a giant folder.

—— Erica Blandelli, a member of the mages' organization [Copper Black Cross], 16 years of age. Height: 164 centimeters. Three sizes: 86,57,88. Kusanagi Godou's lover.

Listening to her detailed narration of these personal details, Godou was overwhelmed by a sense of despair.

"Mariya, all these horrible things about me are not true— they're all fabrications, false reports. At least listen to my explanation, please?"

"I don't know why you could call them 'fabrications'— are you still trying to trick me when the facts are all here? Using the power of a Tyrant to do what you want to women, have you no sense of shame?"

"What do you mean by 'do what you want'?! it's the complete opposite! I'm the one who's being played with!"

"Oh! I never knew that Kusanagi-san was someone who pushed all the blame onto women— I'm beginning to understand even more as to just how despicable a man you are —— Stop your constant attempts at lying now!"

Yuri's face lit up in a smile, but it was only skin deep.

'She's a raksha.' – Godou was completely sure of this point.

If female rakshas really existed, they would all have a smile just like Yuri's. That icy beauty and that mask-like smile.

Godou was browbeaten by the indescribable power that she wielded, and couldn't help but retreat.

…And then he saw.

Fast footsteps which were already hurrying in this direction carried a very familiar silhouette towards him.

Wait, wait, wait, why are you even here?

"If you're thinking of continuing to bully **my** Godou, can I please ask you to stop? The only person that can love him, torment him, or treat him like a toy, is me, the [Diavolo Rosso]. That is a right given only to me, he isn't someone who you can play around with when you feel like it, you know?"

This woman couldn't be here at this place – and let's not even mention that hearing her voice now should be nigh impossible.

What the dumbstruck Godou saw, was the girl that they just mentioned —— Erica Blandelli.

Part 2

Dressed in a red themed outfit and with golden long hair, she was alluringly beautiful; Erica's looks gave the impression of opulent royalty.

However, it wasn't that alone which attracted the eye.

Her most noticeable aspect was probably the elegant aura which she exuded from each hair of her body.

Someone self-proclaimed as naturally drawing all attention and could not be tamed now faced another who could be said to have a great sense of self-respect. The two girls were in a state of perfect equilibrium, and Erica's face broke into a smile of sheer aggressiveness.

"What's wrong, Godou? Why do you look like someone Medusa stared at?"

Erica spoke so sweetly her tone could probably melt gold.

But facing something that should make any man feel pleased, Godou just sighed.

"That's because someone I thought couldn't appear actually did. Geez, this is Tokyo, not Milan— you obviously didn't just come for a chat, so why are you here?"

"Why? You can be so thick sometimes, Godou. If a girl from a far off country took such a long and painful journey, it can only be to meet her lover, isn't it?"

Erica stepped closer to Godou.

She wore a black sleeveless top with a scarlet woolen sweater, paired with a pair of denim jeans.

This modern, turn-of-the-century dressed maiden appeared in an ancient shrine.

Obviously, the two shouldn't match, but he didn't feel any sense of incongruity; probably because, no matter where Erica went, she was the star of any event.

"Come closer, Godou. Wherever and whenever, the only place you can be is by my side."

Erica spoke while intertwining her hand with Godou's, and pulled him towards her.

"What, what are you doing? Suddenly appearing like this, and even doing something so shameless…"

"So what? You know very well what's going on between Godou and I, right? Disturbing a lover's reunion is something that only an insensitive girl would do."

Facing the raging Yuri, Erica flippantly shot back.

'Oi, stop saying things that will cause misunderstandings!' – Would be what Godou would like to say, but he suddenly felt a chill go down his spine. Yuri's mask-like smile would strike fear in anyone.

"This is a hallowed sanctuary for one to propitiate the gods. May I ask both of you to respect the sanctity of this shrine, and to refrain from such disgraceful and shameless acts —— **Erica-san and Kusanagi-san**. Are you listening to me?"

"Yeah, yeah, that's right, Erica, we should listen to Mariya and do as she asks— even you won't play around in a temple, right?"

But the customs of the two Japanese teenagers were brushed aside with a smile from Erica.

"'Play around', huh? But it's the same in Japan and Italy— when a couple recognizes their love for each other in a holy place, it's just like going through a wedding, right?"

"This isn't a wedding event! Stop kidding me!"

More to the point, this whole conversation was happening in Japanese.

Erica's Japanese grammar and pronunciation were impeccable. Erica – and other accomplished sorcerers – probably learned languages the same way Godou learned Italian— through magic, they could learn many languages in a short period of time.

More importantly, because Godou and Erica were speaking in Japanese, Yuri was therefore also able to understand what they just said.

—— Actually, no, even if they were speaking another language, the result would have still been the same.

Yuri's eyes were terrifying; her gaze was ice cold and felt as though killing intent was emanating from them.

To be specific, her gaze was directed specifically at Godou's left arm. That is, the part of his body which a certain Italian maiden was hugging tightly and rubbing gently with her chest.

"Kusanagi-san, could you remove yourself from this shrine? I have fully comprehended the true depths of your lasciviousness, and have nothing more to say to you."

"Wait, wait a minute, Mariya! Give me a minute to shut this fellow up."

Godou gravely turned to face the unexpected gatecrasher, then spoke:

"Erica, if you keep being silly I'm really going to get angry— please try to be serious."

"Ahh, at least you've finally turned serious. So different from your previous puppy-dog-like expression – Un, that's more like my Godou."

The smiling Erica let go of Godou.

That rascal probably came here to help him; but even so, Godou wished that she chose another method to do it… That was probably asking for the impossible, but he still grumbled about it.

"I just mentioned to Mariya how you gave me the Gorgoneion. Did you come to Japan because of this?"

"Smart boy! For that, I'll give you an 'A'— but actually, I was chasing the person that came here first, and so flew to Japan."

"The person that came here first… who is it?"

'I shouldn't ask who. That answer obviously isn't going to be good.' –

Although that was what his intuition told him, Godou still asked very timidly.

Yuri's pale, bloodless face made him very concerned; it couldn't be that her spiritual strength told her that it boded ill…

"Of course it's a [Heretic God]!"

"Of course!"

As Erica spoke, Yuri also sighed and said the same.

His bad feelings were realized, and Godou's mood became even worse.

"How did it chase after the Gorgoneion from Rome? I never said anything about where I was going."

To that question, Erica could only shrug her shoulders.

'Well, humans will never fathom the methods of the gods' – was probably what she meant.

"To be honest, that was probably my fault. I was too optimistic, for the gods, crossing over seas and oceans are as easy as talking… Forget it, since it's already here; focus on how you can force it to retreat."

"Don't talk like it's not your problem. You're the main accomplice in bringing the god here."

"Umm, where is the [Heretic Deity] right now? And its name. What would the exalted one's name be?"

Erica nodded at Godou, the expression on her face saying 'all right, all right, I get it' – and then turned to face Yuri.

"I heard your conversation earlier. You seem to have a spiritual sight— that's perfect right now. Please divine the name of the deity that is approaching."

"Divine it? Do you mean oracular prophecy? Can she do something like that?"

"Probably, we currently hold the Gorgoneion, and someone who personally met the Goddess – Godou – is also present. As long as the diviner is a proper Sibyl, it can be accomplished."

It makes a great difference whether one knows the true name of the divinity one is about to face.

Although Godou had no real experience in this area, he had already learnt the importance of knowing a deity's name.

"… And that's how it is, so could you please help us? Ah, of course this whole disaster is our fault, and I know it is very mean of us to ask for your aid, but still— please help us."

Godou words were completely sincere, and he bowed as he spoke.

Of course, it was all done towards the hime-miko Yuri.

Surprised, she looked like she was about to say something, but finally just sighed deeply.

"It's not like I have a choice, do I? I'll just have to try it, please pass me that stone; and Kusanagi-san, please stretch out your hand. You've met that [Heretic Goddess] before, what was your opinion of her?"

Yuri's left hand held the Gorgoneion, her right held Godou's hand, and murmured something softly.

Then she closed her eyes, and began to speak extremely solemnly.

With this serious and grave atmosphere permeating, Godou naturally grew anxious, and his whole body stiffened in the anticipation.

"I believe… is the night. I am unsure exactly what sort of goddess she is, but I feel that she is a deity of the night."

A mother goddess, a snake, a Gorgoneion, Medusa.

So far, all that Godou had heard were key words defining her.

None of them had elicited an instinctive response from Godou. The goddess whom he met in Rome may very well have been a member of the night; her words he felt certain.

"The night… eyes like obsidian, a silver haired, youthful goddess… no, not youthful, rather a goddess stripped of her age and her divine position… hence she is young… hence she is [Heretical]…"

Yuri was muttering out loud details about the goddess which no one had told her.

So this was the power of spiritual insight… Godou was deeply impressed – it was almost as good as omniscience.

"And her divine name is… That is, the name of the [Heretic Goddess] is —— eh!?"

Yuri suddenly opened her eyes in amazement, but was completely silent.

Godou and Erica looked at each other. If she was that shocked, did that mean that someone of apocalyptic proportions had arrived?

"What did you see? Who is it? Could it be a name that even you know?"

"Ye, Yes… But there must be some mistake somewhere. Because , well… this goddess should be an enemy of Gorgons… of all serpentine deities; even I know that much about her."

"A god–head that even a Japanese miko knows… well, what is her name?"

Erica pressed on with her questioning.

Her current piercing gaze had no trace of her previous playfulness.

"She is Athena. The goddess that Kusanagi-san met, the goddess that has arrived in Japan, her name is Athena. But that is impossible, isn't it…?"

Medusa, the devil with snakes for hair, the one whose one look could turn others to stone.

And the hero who subdued her, Perseus.

And the one who shielded him, who guided him, was the goddess who stood for wisdom and war – Athena. At least, that was what Greek myths said…

Why such a dangerous Goddess appeared, was something Godou just couldn't figure out.

Part 3

Poseidon, the ruler of seas and tempests was her mortal enemy.

Well, the Greek stories had it as such.

That truth was this Athena did not hate the seas, as the seas and the lands were both an intrinsic part of the qualities which were stripped from her, and the source of her existence.

What she really hated was the sun.

The glowing rays, the dazzling brilliance of his aethereal throne; this was the real irritant to this queen of the night.

However, it was just an irritant. At least it was nothing truly threatening.

The sun was also the flame of the spirit, an essential part of both life and death, graciously enduring this brilliance was also part of being a queen.

—— No.

This way of thinking was wrong in propriety, and even wronger in rectitude. Because she was still the [Heretic Goddess] Athena, because she still had not recovered her position of the tripartite queen.

Wafting in the remnants of her memory were the sighs of the mother, the rebukes of the queen, and the wisdom of the crone.

Inside this shattered body, once glorious, only remained the thought of striking against her father – the king of the heavens, controller of the sun, Zeus.

Just a short while longer.

All she needed was to take back the ancient representation of the [Serpent], the Gorgoneion, and she would truly become ' Athena'.

Standing above the wind and the waves, she was seeking any scent of the [Serpent]. Where was it? Where was it waiting for her? In the east? In that far off land to the east, was it with that person?

She gave a shallow smile.

The Gorgoneion was indeed near the scent of a familiar person.

In the end, it was him who stole the [Serpent]. The last time she had met a Campione was such a long time in the past; it was probably hundreds, no, thousands of years ago.

Facing her mortal enemy, Athena, in her aspect as a war goddess, erupted in a bloodthirsty shout.

_____

"Ahh… Anna-san, thank you very much."

Godou unsteadily crawled out of the back seat of a very scarily driven car.

How fresh was the air outside!

Returning from the brink of death, anyone would believe the same thing.

'I never expected to sit in that mad, suicidal automotive ever again. No, I'll probably be in it a few months down the road.' – Godou had already resigned himself to his fate, but never expected 'The Terror' to come for him after just a few days.

The look on his face had to be horrible.

Even Erica, who just came out after him, was also very pale; an uncomfortable look on her face truly was a rare sight.

"Not at all, being of service to Godou-san and Erica-sama is my pleasure."

Arianna's smile bloomed across her face, and got out of the driver's seat.

She was able to act so nonchalantly after driving like a maniac. So she was abnormal as well.

—— After they found out about Athena.

Godou literally flew out of Nanao Shrine,

Of course, it was to go searching for the goddess. Besides, Erica had probably already found out her location. Asking her, Godou was not disappointed.

As he was about to leave with the Gorgoneion, Yuri shouted after him.

"How can you bring the one thing that Athena is looking for straight to her!? What is going through that skull of yours! Please leave it with me for the moment. Geez… I just don't know what to do with you!"

Yuri sighed in exasperation, and took the Gorgoneion from Godou.

However, what she said was true.

Godou suddenly realized how little real planning he had done for this, and felt extremely bad for Yuri, who was trying to help him.

Leaving the temple, Erica immediately phoned Anna.

'… I guess it was to be expected, huh?'

Of course she would bring someone fluent in Japanese with her.

Godou could accept what was going on up to that point. What broke down was that Anna appeared in a huge four-wheel drive car.

"… We don't have any time. If I had a choice, I wouldn't sit in that death machine either, but the only way we'll get to Athena quickly is by car."

Erica whispered just loudly enough for Godou to hear her. The rare expression on the face of the [Diavolo Rosso] was that of consternation.

"Does Anna-san even have an international license…? Forget that— there must be something wrong with the Italians, giving her a license in the first place!"

"In case you were wondering, apparently, she got her license in Japan."

And so the both of them foisted the blame onto each other. Sadly however, there was no point crying over spilt milk.

So Godou and Erica consoled themselves with the old adage, and entered the back seat. The moment when both put on their seatbelts, the unassuming vehicle suddenly became a flash of lightning.

They were probably in there for about an hour?

Perhaps it was even shorter, but their bodies felt as though they had suffered for that long.

In addition, although this was an automatic, the speed felt no different from Godou's previous experience.

The car, going at almost a hundred kilometers an hour, managed to safely go round the roundabout without causing any accident, and for that Godou almost cried in joy.

'It's been such a long time since I've smelt the ocean air.'

At least, that was what Godou thought as he looked at a nameless stretch of sand that was far removed from Narashino city .

"Athena is somewhere near here. Godou, come with me. Arianna, wait here."

Erica spoke, while taking a chain from the end of a small pocket watch.

Then she wrapped it around her middle finger, and then shook it around the area.

It looked like some form of investigative magic.

Whenever she wanted to find something, Erica would often use this sort of spell; in fact, she probably did the same thing to find Godou at Nanao Shrine.

"I understand. Please be careful, okay?"

Anna bowed deeply, and watched the two leave.

Erica walked towards the coastline, and Godou simply followed behind.

She strode with a definite sense of purpose; it seemed as though she was very sure where Athena was.

"Hey, does Anna-san always drive like that?"

Godou asked when he made sure Anna was out of sight.

It was already past five o'clock.

The two walked on the orange, tousled scrub near the sea.

Although wave-breakers were sticking out into the water and seawalls on the beach so that you couldn't simply jump into the sea, the view was still quite amazing.

"Of course! Arianna is amazing— someone who drives like that and yet has never had an accident or hurt anyone, is in a sense a natural genius at driving."

"I feel the same… although you don't see it at first, isn't she a little bit too airheaded? She has absolutely no idea of it herself."

"There's nothing wrong with that. Arianna is intelligent, dedicated, hardworking and even funny— she's basically perfect. Although she has four flaws, they are only small problems."

… Let's not get into 'intelligent', what do you mean by 'funny'?

When the word 'funny' comes out of Erica's mouth, it means the equivalent of 'deadly poison' to the average person.

"Just out of interest, can you tell me what these four flaws are?"

"Her driving is extremely dangerous, she had no aptitude in martial and magical arts, her stews and soups are bad enough to make a child cry just from their smell, and although her work is regularly perfect, a big accident will occur every three days —— these are the four points."

'…These flaws are things that a knight and a maid can't afford to have, right?'

'But Erica always preferred (at least, that's how I see it) entertaining and funny things over the simple and practical. If it's that way, it makes more sense.'

The two discussed this completely irrelevant subject as they walked along.

The meeting with the silver haired girl —— the [Heretical Goddess], was about ten minutes after that.

They had no idea how she got it, but she wore a thin wool jacket , a miniskirt and knee-high socks, and above her silvery hair she wore a knitted cap.

The sea breeze wafted up her hair which sparkled, as though reflecting the brilliance of the moon.

—— There was no doubt about it.

This little goddess always made Godou think of 'darkness'.

"It has been some time, Campione. I am delighted at our reunion."

The girl spoke the antiquated phrase with a clear, feminine voice.

Godou replied unhappily, even coldly:

"Well, I'm pissed, because you guys go around disturbing people's calm and happy lives for no apparent reason. To tell the truth, you're a pain in the ass."

"For a divine child of Epimetheus to take such a moral tone, thou art truly a unique Campione."

She narrowed her eyes in reply.

Although Athena didn't give off an air of combat, it didn't mean that they could now relax. The actions and thoughts of the gods are not fathomable by man.

"Let us first make assay. One carries the divine title of Athena—thou wouldst do well to remember it."

Finally, the name came from the person herself.

Forget Greece, even amongst the states around the Mediterranean it was the greatest amongst the goddesses there. If only she gave another name…

"Campione of the East, reveal thy name. Before our contest of supremacy for the relic of the [Serpent], one requires to know the name of one's opponent."

Dark eyes which were devoid of any feeling.

Athena spoke without emotion.

"I should have no reason to fight with you."

"Thou have taken the Gorgoneion from its ancient metropolis. Those… *conjurers* set you up to it, didn't they? Whoever takes the [Serpent] away from oneself, qualifies as one's enemy. Our fight is inevitable."

Although Godou was quite sure she was referring to mages, Athena didn't even glance at Erica.

While she had some idea of magical organizations, she didn't care in the slightest who they were; in her eyes, only Godou was of any significance.

"One graciously awaits thy nomenclature."

"Kusanagi Godou, and she is Erica Blandelli. Even if you are a goddess, it's still extremely rude to ignore someone completely."

Godou looked at Erica, and then gave his name.

"Kusanagi Godou— what an unfamiliar name. A masculine title of foreigners, is it? One shall remember it well."

Unsurprisingly, Athena simply disregarded any mention of Erica.

The girl at Godou's side understood, of course, and she slowly but surely created a gap, so that she would not be in the way of Godou and Athena, while softly muttering to herself ——

Godou could see that she was definitely **not** getting along well with the goddess.

Her gaze was saying, 'stop chatting and just beat each other up already!'

Naturally, Godou ignored it, and glanced around.

No one was around. Even though there was nothing stopping people from coming here, without the exception of Godou and Erica, there were no other humans around —— was this because of Athena?

Perhaps she didn't want unnecessary attention.

A divine aura needs only a thought to affect humans.

As long as Athena was here, people would never come here. As long as gods were around, they could and would change the actions and thoughts of the humans around.

Of course, most divinities would not be in the human realm, but there were obvious exceptions.

Those familiar with the gods called them [Heretical Deities].

"And if it please thee, Kusanagi Godou, one shall ask of thou again. Where does the Gorgoneion now lie?"

"Please… do you think that I'll actually tell you?"

"Nay, but it was necessary to make confirmation. Part of one now yearns to clash arms, confirms thee to be a foe, thirsts to slake the battle-lust. But another part of one, the goddess of wisdom, wishes to make this warning."

Athena's dark eyes spiraled into the abyss, but seemed to flash alight in amusement.

Godou thought he remembered seeing a gaze like that before… where was it?

"Thou truly art a distinctively different Campione, The strength thou seized from one's compatriot ought to be paltry, yet one's wisdom tell one that thou art an exceedingly dangerous foe, and one might suffer surprisingly deep wounds… just as a trap causes one to feel menaced."

An owl.

Godou suddenly had that thought.

Athena's eyes seemed very similar to that of an owl.

The Goddess in human form and the nocturnal avian of course have completely different eyes. Yet, his instinct as a Campione told him that the two were the same —— but why?

"So, one will ask you a question. How thou doth reply shall determine our relation henceforth. One is Athena, the goddess of both martial and intellectual pursuits. Thou may surrender or take up the challenge. Tell one, what is thine reply?"

"If I could, I'd like to solve this peacefully too, but…"

Although it was a surprising compromise, he couldn't just hand over the Gorgoneion.

Godou desperately decided to try another option.

"I refuse both. I have another idea— just give up on the Gorgoenion, and go back. Rather than making us both suffer, this is the more humane option."

One cannot measure the strength of a god.

One cannot describe the power of a god.

Even in the form of a human, the strength Athena kept contained in her body was unfathomable. Even just meeting a god, just talking to one, could cause the hearts and minds of humans to fluctuate.

Facing Athena who was already this powerful, Godou was determined to avoid making her use even stronger abilities.

Even so, Godou still wished to avoid a fight; could everyone find some leeway in their hearts, and come to conclusion without harm for anyone? Facing such a (surprisingly) reasonable goddess, he sincerely presented this idea.

…This was bad.

Facing a constantly nearing Athena, Godou still let down his guard.

"Thou speaketh the truth. Battle between gods and Campione can only bring both to grief— there can be no real result. However, there is yet another way to settle this matter."

They were now an arm's length from each other.

"One's deepest apologies, Kusanagi Godou. Thou art a most compassionate and loving man, for a Campione. However, 'tis undeniable that you are a warrior, and even more sadly, also a king. In thine defense, someday thou might emerge to be a great hero, though it is a day that will sadly never arrive —— please forgive one."

Before she finished speaking, she wrapped her arms behind his head.

What was she trying to do? Godou didn't even have the time to form that thought, when Athena rose on her toes and, with her cherry-red lips, planted a kiss firmly on Godou's own.

"——?"

He was too shocked to even respond.

"One seekth the Gorgoneion. Restest in repose, Kusanagi Godou . Thy breath, thy very life has been grasped by Athena. Go thy lonely ways to the dark recesses of the earth, the cold, empty halls of the dead."

The moment she kissed him, Athena began her incantation, and with it a deathly chill seeped through Godou's body —— damn.

This was an incantation of death.

He felt his every limb grow cold, and the flame of life began to pall.

No, hang on.

Why would a goddess of battle and wisdom know such an incantation?

Even though gods were a pretty messed up lot, they were all very scrupulous in keeping to their specifications. For example, gods who had nothing to do with fire or mountains couldn't get volcanoes to explode, while those who were not affiliated with water and the sea were unable to flood places.

So did that mean that Athena was some sort of death god?

"Just as the famous trick before the walls of Troy[1E 7], thou truly doth have no defense… Hmm? Even though thou hast received one's gift of eternal sleep, yet thine eyes are so interesting. "

Forcing his knees from bending, Godou kept glaring at Athena.

A goddess of wisdom and war, closely affiliated with the [Serpent], a dweller in darkness; Godou could only wonder what the real face of the goddess was.

…That said, he remembered reading something at home before (when he was bored).

In the West, the owl was the sign of wisdom, the messenger and symbol of the goddess of wisdom Minerva, and there was a saying that "the owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of dusk." [1E 8]

And this Minerva was the Roman appellation given to the Greek Athena.

This goddess related to both snakes and owls —— just who was she?

"A gaze filled with wisdom. How stubborn— or is it determination? But 'tis a pity. Even with thine determination, without the will to take arms all comes to naught. Determination without force is useless on the battlefield."

Athena's tone of voice displayed the entertainment she found from Godou's useless struggles.

…His sight was getting increasingly blurry.

And just as death opened its gaping maw, Godou faintly heard Erica's voice.

"Eloi, Eloi, Lama Sabachthani! My God! Why hast thou forsaken me!"

Erica loudly proclaimed that dirge-like incantation, that strongest of spells.

"Though each bone of my body is shattered, my heartache melts like a lit candle. You shall bury me in the dust of dead earth! Wild dogs surround me, evil company hems me in!"

'She really is an amazing woman.' – Godou couldn't help but respect that.

Even if Erica was a mage, she was in the end only a human, yet she still planned to take on a god.

"O Lord my Savior, I beseech you— aid me! Snatch me away from the weapons of the enemy, snatch me from the jaws of the lion, snatch me from the horns of the bull!"

Even if Erica was a very intelligent person, there was no chance of victory against a god.

And there was no need to ask what her reason was; it was obviously to save him. 'So, I can't die here. I can't let Erica risk death for nothing!'

—— For I am strongest amongst the strong. Truly, I am one that holds each and every victory.

—— I care not whom challenges me, whether man or devil; I may face all my foes and all my enemies. Regardless, I shall crush all those who wouldst stand in my way!

Erica rushed in, her blade flashing, facing an agile, evading Athena.

Godou hazily looked to the battle between the two girls, while reciting the divine verse. In his mind was Verethragna's eighth form —— the [Ram].

Chapter 5 - The Deathblow from Knight and Lord

Part 1

"Thus I do declare the name of God, that the world may now offer service, offer praise to the Eternal!"

Halfway through her incantation, an aura of despair began to surround Erica.

In addition, the actual temperature of the beach also fell to around twenty degrees.

Sounds unable to be heard by the common ear – cries of despair , screams of futility, and the wailing of the hopelessness – all these sounds coalesced into a single body, hanging in the freezing air.

All this were the effects brought forth by Erica's incantation.

"Goddess Athena, as a subordinate of Kusanagi Godou, the knight Erica Blandelli humbly beseeches. If it pleases you, depart immediately. If thou suffers not to heed my pleadings, I shall defend mine Lord with mine blade!"

The air rang with her firm declaration.

Her back guarded by a magically summoned crimson banner, she faced the goddess with Cuore di Leone in her hand.

Having heard her declaration, the goddess turned and acknowledged the girl for the first time.

"Oh? As a stepdaughter of Prometheus —— as a follower of Hermes, thou art willing to die for your master?"

"If necessary. To perish in a glorious manner for one's Lord, the knight feels only pleasurable satisfaction. In choosing as enemy the most ancient of goddesses, Athena, an understanding such as this is only natural."

'Why is Godou… always making life hard for me?!'

Erica mouthed quietly.

That Athena could completely grasp the weaknesses of the Campione; and more specifically, Godou.

Just from their short exchange, she managed to not only realize that unless Godou was forced into a corner, he wouldn't fight, and that he was a goody-two-shoes, and *most of all*, he even got kissed!

Looking at the corpse-like Godou, sprawled on the floor, Erica's stare grew fiercer.

When was this man ever going to learn?!

Although this wasn't something that happened very often, there were simply too many holes in his defenses, plus he was too open to women, and so a kiss was easily stolen from him.

As a general rule, Campiones had ridiculously high natural defenses against spells and other incantations.

Even though his opponent was a god, the fact remained that he would not have been easily overwhelmed. But if the spell was somehow able to be performed directly on the body, then there was nothing to be done; if such a method was employed, even a mage such as Erica would have easily succeeded.

"You're really such a troublesome fellow, making me work so hard…"

While continuously muttering complaints, Erica formed her spell into an arrow, which shot towards Athena.

If her opponent were a human, that strike alone would have been enough to finish him.

Even if it was an extremely accomplished mage, it would have left him unable to stand.

Her verses of despair were incantations of death, which chilled the hearts of her enemies, yet Athena merely shook her head.

With a goddess as her foe, a weak attack like that would obviously have no effect at all.

Erica lightly touched Cuore di Leone, then chanted:

"O lion of steel, thou art the mind and body of sorrow and fury. Thou art the harbringer of grief to gods and spirits, one who will bathe in the blood of your foes— Appear before me, the spear of Longinus ——!"

Gathering together the already coalescing incantations, she directed them to the blade of her favorite weapon.

Erica raised Cuore di Leone, now charged with power, and dashed forward.

In a flash, she crossed the gap between herself and Athena, then thrust with her sword.

As though merely amused, the goddess simply leaned to the side, and so evaded the sword thrust. Erica, of course, was *not impressed* by this, but…

She didn't end her move there.

Face, skull, left shoulder, thighs, abdomen, chest, throat, and finally, her right wrist.

Erica set those parts of the body as her target and kept up her attacks.

Without a trace of hesitation, like a bolt of lightning or the gust of wind, she continued to press Athena.

Each time Erica's blade neared the goddess, she would evade the strike.

However, facing Erica's unpredictable and multi-directional style of combat, Athena finally gave up on dodging, and used the back of her hand to stop the final swing at her wrist.

Under normal circumstances, something like that would have left her with half a hand, but the goddess's hand was as strong as steel, and warded off the blow.

Having succeeded, Athena glanced at her hand; then her expression suddenly changed. She seemed… excited.

"—— I see, as expected of one who dared challenge me— certainly, thou doth possess some ability."

On the hand which just blocked Cuore di Leone, a thin red line had appeared.

From that fresh cut, blood was trickling out.

It was a sword wound.

It was a simple fact that human weapons were completely incapable of harming a deity, let alone bother them. Forget swords, neither gunpowder weaponry and explosives, nor even chemical or biological weapons were able to do any damage.

On what was a supposedly immortal body, somehow a fresh wound had appeared.

While smiling and gazing at the blood dripping from her hand, Athena spoke.

"How rare. One had long forgotten her previous instance of injury from a mortal."

"My sword is currently infused with a spell on the same lethality level as the holy spear Longinus, with a power capable of extinguishing the Son of God or any wicked demon or deity. Even you, Athena, wouldn't escape unharmed if you were struck by this sword."

Whilst lightly rattling her Cuore di Leone, Erica flippantly spoke thus.

If her opponent showed any sign of movement, she planned on instantly attacking; however, Athena seemed completely unconcerned.

What she did feel, was that due to the previous attack, Athena's attention was now truly focused on her body, and the previous uncaring attitude had disappeared.

"Truly, mortal, your words ring true. That blade is extremely lethal to one's body, and may even be able to steal the very breath from me. Truly, one pities your current position. If thou had not stupidly vowed loyalty and devotion to that Campione, one wouldst have bestowed upon you a blessing, and accepted you as one's devotee."

Even though Erica was facing her with a blade, Athena only gazed at her with a loving and caring expression, her eyes those of a protector, as though looking at a lovable pet, or a laboring gardener in a park.

—— What to do now?

Erica asked herself; if Godou was with her, perhaps the two of them could do something, but since she was alone, the situation was not exactly a rosy one.

And her opponent was a goddess in combat.

Even with a blade on par with the god-subduing spear Longinus, and her skills in swordplay and sorcery, just how much of that would make a difference – she was very uncertain about the outcome.

In the past, Godou, before he was a Campione, much less a mage, managed to defeat Verethragna as a mere mortal.

But that victory should be considered a combination of many coincidences, and a ridiculous amount of good luck. Furthermore, it was because the very person who fought was Kusanagi Godou, that he managed to pull it off. In addition, he had his 'secret weapon', the [Secret Tome of Prometheus], which no longer existed in the mortal world.

It looked like escape was the only option.

'Right now, the most important thing is to evade the deathblow she will send my way.'

"Saint George! By thine holy title, bestow upon me the dragon slaying strength!"

Erica loudly proclaimed thus.

Even if she was planning to escape, there was no way she would just let her opponent off like that.

Even when retreating, she must do so with awesome presence and grace —— that was Erica's knightly code.

Cuore di Leone's form began to change.

From a thin rapier, it transformed into a two meter long spear.

Erica superbly wielded the heavy spear, and struck with speed three times.

How would Athena respond? Would she retreat, evade it, or counter and advance?

—— She retreated.

The goddess leaped back with agility, far exceeding the striking range of the spear.

Seeing Athena's response, Erica let a brilliant smile show; for those who knew her, it was a smile that showed that she believed her ploy would succeed.

Advancing to combat a retreating enemy was the most effective means of employing her style of combat, which focused on devastating speed.

"O Copper Red Cross, rend apart the armor of the dragon, rip out its organs! O my departed forebears, knights who lie now in eternal rest, I beseech you— bestow upon me thy outstanding military service!"

Finishing her incantations, Erica flung out the spear she held.

Originally an attack meant to be used against those that were even further away; these petty details were not something she would worry about now. The spear, flying from her hand, hurled like a silver-hued comet towards Athena's heart.

—— This method of ranged javelin combat was particularly favored by the Etruscans[1F 1].

Eventually, the Romans learned this method of warfare from them, and during the Middle Ages, the Knights of the Round table raised it up to yet another notch[1F 2]. However, facing this attack, Athena merely smashed it aside with her fist.

The strange thing was, the spear that should have lain on the sand, somehow savagely continued to fly towards the goddess.

"……Oh?"

The silver spear had become a silver lion.

Cuore di Leone had, in the blink of an eye, changed its form and jumped up while riding the force of the blow. Athena gazed at the teeth of the nearby lion while showing an admiring smile.

"Really, you do quite amaze one ——"

Athena evaded the lion's leap, and quickly struck with the side of her palm.

Less than half the size of Cuore di Leone, she nevertheless attacked it anyway, hacking at the natural lines of the head, body and shoulder, turning it into a pile of animal parts.

What really shocked Athena came immediately after this.

"Cuore di Leone! Having received the blessings of both Holy Spirit and saint, complete thy work with an indestructible body!"

Erica chanted the final line of the incantation, instructing her faithful blade with a new objective.

……The now fragmented Cuore di Leone changed form again, each part shifting to the shape of a lion. Athena now found herself surrounded by seven lions.

"Ahahaha, you really know how to waste my time!"

Having heard Athena's strident laughter, Erica whistled, and one of the surrounding lions bounded over to her side.

—— with this, she didn't need to use any more tactics.

Erica quickly picked up Godou, then jumped onto the lion's back.

While her opponent was surrounded by six lions, as long as she did her best to escape without looking back – Even if the opponent was Athena, facing a dueling ground charged with a despairing incantation, and a Cuore di Leone blessed by God, there was no way she could easily deal with them and then still catch up with them… at least, she hoped.

Erica sincerely prayed that her enemy would not come running, while encouraging the lion to hurry.

In front of her, Godou was lying on the lion's back in deep sleep . Of course, there was no way he would just die like this. No matter how ridiculously unfair the circumstances, he was a man who would always find the means and path to victory; there was no way he would die so easily.

She placed her hand on Godou's chest, confirming his warmth and his pulse.

Having received the encouragement she was looking for, Erica let out a pleased, knowing smile.

Part 2

This so called near-death experience really was extremely discomforting.

Godou, who had yet to fully awake, thought in his foggy mind.

The eighth incarnation, the [Ram], offered miraculous powers of recovery. Regardless of how critical his body's condition was, its divine power would always bring a full recovery.

While Verethragna was a god of victory, he was also a defender of kingship.

Among the ten forms, the [Ram] had the deepest relationship with kingship. In ancient times when herding could be equated with wealth, the sheep, able to grow quickly and reproduce with abundance, was a symbol of vitality and prosperity.

Fertile, productive, rich.

The power to demonstrate vitality was a perfect representation of the sheep that exhibited these traits.

But if he was killed instantly, then this ability would become useless... considering this, he couldn't help but break out in cold sweat every time he woke up from unconsciousness, since he must consciously use this ability before dying for it to work.

To make it even more dangerous, this ability was only useable when he was on the brink of death.

Godou personally experienced before the inability to use this power to heal conventional serious injuries.

Of course, even with such harsh restrictions, it was still an astounding ability.

Godslayers could seize the abilities of the god they killed.

A divine power acquired this way was called an [Authority].

This meant that the more gods one killed, the more powerful a godslayer becomes.

Godou had only defeated one god so far — Verethragna, but it had been said that many godslayers were monsters holding multiple [Authorities].

— Born to this world to fight the gods, warriors who represented mankind.

Erica once described godslayers as this: they are warriors, kings, monsters, but at the same time also people; they were existences that went beyond common sense.

Godslayers were born from neither innate ability, nor effort, and definitely not blood or destiny.

Only victory could give birth to a godslayer.

Even if one had innate talent, even if one worked harder than anyone in the world, without victory, one could never become a godslayer.

That was way too strict, Godou thought.

His own victory over Verethragna had entirely depended on a series of unbelievably lucky events.

Forget normal people, even special people like prodigies or legendary masters would never be able to defeat a god. The difference in power was simply too great, great enough to make any comparison between the two completely meaningless.

Only after a series of miraculous occurrences was it possible for man to defeat god.

Yet a chain of unbelievable coincidences could give birth to a godslayer, granting them more power than any man could ever have.

.....Even Godou himself thought this wasn't such a good idea.

Only those born as gods or those reborn as godslayers could oppose one another, that was simply beyond all common sense.

For such a thing to be achievable only through luck, that definitely wasn't a good thing. This kind of power should never be given to a single man, so Godou hoped to restrain himself as much as possible, not to abuse this power, but.....

He realized he was starting to gain control over Verethragna's powers.

The first time he used the [Ram], it took him six hours to recover from unconsciousness. The second time it was only four hours. Every time he used it, the time to regain consciousness decreased.

How short can this period shrink?

When he switched to an incarnation, he could use numbers like these to describe his proficiency with the power. Of course, Godou didn't like falling to the brink of death, but to slowly gain control of such powers was yet another reason why he didn't like using them.

His consciousness began to clear.

As he woke up, Godou found himself lying on a stiff bed.

Seemed like the bed came with pillows, but he wasn't sure why it was so soft and warm behind his head.

"How does it feel? Can you get up?"

Erica whispered beside his ear.

Just like every time up until now, she had stayed beside his near-dead self this time as well.

"......Where are we? And, how long was I gone?"

"This is a bench in some park we escaped to, and you were only unconscious for two and a half hours this time. Congratulations, it's a new record."

"This kind of new record doesn't make me happy at all. I rather have the time increase."

"Knew you would say that, but this time the time reduction dropped again, and probably wouldn't decrease anymore? — Does that make you a little more relieved?"

Erica answered with a gentle smile.

Even though she always dragged Godou about everywhere, it was surprising that when he was at his weakest, Erica's attitude would also become very gentle.

"Hn, a little relieved."

It seemed like he still hasn't awakened fully; Godou's eyesight was still somewhat blurry, and he couldn't see the surroundings very well.

The only thing that reassured him was Erica's presence beside him.

"......If possible, I really wish someone else could defeat this god. Even though, it's rather ungrateful for me to say this after just barely managing to keep my life."

"That's impossible. Our opponent isn't someone you can defeat through sheer luck— Of course, having good luck is a necessity, but final victory will be decided by your strengths and character. You're someone qualified to defeat the gods, so you should have some more confidence in yourself."

Erica said this as she gracefully twirled her wrist.

Using her hands as a comb, Erica was grooming Godou's hair; her gentle, rhythmic movements made Godou feel extremely comfortable... 'Wait, she's combing my hair?'

"You may only have a portion of the power now, but one day you will definitely control all of Verethragna's authorities, because you're someone who will break through any obstacle to achieve victory. Until Godou becomes a true king, I will always protect you— no matter who the enemy is, I will never allow them to kill you, or hand you to anyone else."

Erica's whispers changed from her usual gentle tone to one filled with determination.

It truly made him happy.

To be honest, Godou felt like he didn't deserve this treatment, and he sort of wanted to apologize. But.....

"T-Thank you. I always cause troubles for Erica, but Erica still treats me like this. I'm really thankful, but also feel a little bad....."

"You don't need to apologize to me, since it's me who wanted to do this from the bottom of my heart. I only want Godou to love me honestly. Simple enough?"

"Eh, I have to apologize for saying something like this during such a time, but this position really isn't good!"

At this moment, Godou finally awoke fully and realized his situation.

There was nothing abnormal about his body; his hands and feet were as good as ever.

He was lying on a long, dirty bench in a small park. Erica sat beside him, with his head on her lap, while her hand combed through his hair—

"No way. You've just returned from death's door— be obedient and rest."

As she said that, Erica used her unusual strength to press Godou, who was attempting to get up, back down to where he was .

Erica's legs were as thin and elegant as a deer's, while her thighs were particularly soft and made him feel very comfortable.

This really was a dangerous situation.

It wouldn't be good if he kept laying here like this without saying anything.

Godou wanted to escape his current circumstances, to the point of thinking about rolling off the bench.

"Godou, don't you think it's impolite to refuse the good gestures of another so stubbornly? Especially after saving your life?"

Even though she said that, Erica's tone sounded extremely happy.

Godou was embarrassed to the point that he didn't even dare look at Erica's face. All he wanted was to escape the current situation.

"Regarding that, I'm really grateful towards you, and I apologize. But, no matter how you look at this situation right now, it isn't good!"

"But why? Isn't this just the basics of developing our relationship? It's about time we stopped the introductions and started our skinship stage. We should spend more time to properly foster our feelings for one another."

Stop saying such selfish words.

How could the man named Kusanagi Godou have the courage to take such a step!

"But we can leave this for later, since we need to plan for when you get better. Godou, how do you plan to deal with Athena? After reaching this point, don't tell me you still want to sit down and negotiate?"

Erica seemed to realize that it was too cruel to keep pushing, so she changed the topic.

Finally they could talk normally. Godou let out his breath as he replied to Erica.

"You're right, but I plan to go find her first, then I'll decide on the final course of action based on the circumstances....."

"That's to say, you plan to attack immediately, and then force the situation into a standoff, right?"

Erica gave an interpretation that was completely off from Godou's words.

"How did you arrive at that conclusion? When did I say it like that?"

"Because it ends up like that every time, so in the current situation, I'd suggest we start preparing [Sword]— you know what the consequences of being ill-prepared against an opponent like Athena will be like, right?"

"......Right, we need to prepare for the worst after all."

Godou began to think.

Since he had let Athena off, she could have retrieved the Gorgonieon at any time. He needed foolproof preparations to face an even more powerful Athena.

Without sufficient power at hand, even negotiations wouldn't go anywhere. This was the core of the problem that Erica pointed out directly.

"Since that's the case, how are you going to ask for my aid? Come on, say it already."

Erica looked smug.

Even though she was fully aware of what it took, she was intentionally making Godou beg her. What a cruel woman.

"......Fine, I take back what I just said. Please teach me everything you know about Athena. I must prepare myself to fight that goddess."

Without the help of this person before him, Godou had no chance in a fight against Athena.

As he thought of this, he lowered his head to beg Erica.

"Very good, now my answer is decided."

Erica left the long bench and knelt down before Godou's feet.

With a joyous grin, she respectfully said:

"My liege, I shall do as you wish. You are the master of my sword, and the king of us mages. So long as you wish it, I shall grant you the key to victory."

Every once in a while, Erica would take this kind of respectful attitude.

Godou felt uncomfortable, so he pulled her back up.

"I told you, don't say it like that.....I want Erica to be her usual self."

"Really? Then let's do it like usual. Godou, sit over here, we'll start now."

Godou was suddenly pushed back down by Erica to sit on the bench.

Realizing the signs of danger, Godou started panicking.

Were they really going to do this?

"When I said please teach me, I meant telling me using your mouth, please don't use any strange spells or ritualistic items."

"How long do you think it would take me to tell you? Athena is descended from the most ancient goddesses, so there are countless pieces of history and mythology surrounding her. No way am I going to talk about all of them, way too troublesome."

Erica moved closer to Godou as she said this.

Since she quickly sealed Godou's mouth with her lips, he could no longer continue his resistance.

.....After a long kiss, Erica briefly parted her lips and said:

"Hehe, I'm really happy right now, since Godou had been so cold to me recently. You had kept me at such an obvious distance, yet you had secretly met up with that strange woman or being forced into a kiss with Athena, so I had been really unhappy."

Although she said she was unhappy, her tone was sweet.

Their faces were extremely close, almost to the point of their foreheads touching one another.

"I-I wasn't being secretive, and the case with Athena was a completely unexpected accident. But seriously, I still don't think this is a good idea. We should use a more complete, more permanent method than this!"

"What could be better than meeting the lips of your lover. Besides, the one who took my first kiss was Godou, and you've done so again several times since then. After all that, why do you still mind it?"

"But that was all done to fight the gods! It wasn't like that kind of love—"

Godou's mouth was blocked again before he could finish.

This time even the tongue stuck in.

—Was it really necessary to go this far!?

He couldn't open his mouth even if he wanted to ask; it was such an annoying situation. For a high school boy to be treated this way and still arouse no desire, it could only be that kind of extremely abnormal guy.

Godou struggled to escape the honey trap before him.

But he just couldn't get away.

Their wrist strengths were simply far too different; how could this woman be so strong?

"Let's start with Athena's birth, such as who was Athena's mother? Then there's the relationship between Athena and Medusa."

Erica spoke gently in between her soft kisses with Godou.

"In Greek Mythology, Athena's mother was Metis[1F 3]. She was Zeus' first wife, as well as the goddess of wisdom, but their history wasn't a good one. According to one legend, Zeus raped Metis by transforming into a fly, which caused her to conceive Athena."

Serpent.

A tail appeared within his mental imagery, and formed into the shadow of a complete snake. It was followed by a cow, and then wings — which meant the shadows of birds coming by.

"To Zeus, Metis was merely an object of his desire. The only reason he took her as wife was to maintain his image by rewriting

the myth. After finding out about Metis' pregnancy, Gaia and Uranus[1F 4] predicted that if she gave birth to a boy, then he would be even more powerful than Zeus himself."

Godslayers had powerful resistances against magic.

That wasn't only effective against enemies, but also affected harmless and beneficial spells.

Even spells from his companions would still bounce off a godslayer, unless the magic was directly inserted into his body like what Athena did.

What Erica used right now was her magic of endowing her knowledge upon another.

Every history that was related to Athena.

The goal was to quickly teach Godou all of the mythology and divine traits related to Athena.

"Fearing the unborn child, he swallowed both Metis and her child, hoping to destroy both mother and child while absorbing Metis' wisdom for his own use. But the child Metis was pregnant with, Athena, ended up being born from Zeus' head."[1F 5]

The words that came from Erica's lips transferred phenomenal amounts of knowledge into Godou's mind.

The tenth incarnation of Verethragna, the [Warrior], was said to own a golden sword.

And this process was indispensable for forging that sword.

Only after receiving sufficient knowledge about the opposing god could Kusanagi Godou change his form to [Warrior].

In other words, Athena is a goddess born from the death of her mother. This is an extremely important detail— in Greece, 'Metis' also means 'Wisdom', but it's also the origin of 'Medusa'.

Metis and Medusa.

These two words both contained the same meaning, and they were also the names of goddesses with deep connections to Athena .

The trinity goddess, a single body formed from Metis, Medusa, and Athena.

Godou suddenly realized the meaning within.

It was all thanks to the knowledge that Erica had transferred using her lips and tongue, her sweet breath and saliva, that the true face of Athena had finally been unlocked.

Erica's tongue squiggled flirtatiously to find the location of Godou's tongue.

The enormous knowledge that filled him and his pleasant sensations raced through Godou's mind.

He should let things fall naturally into place like this.

Godou's consciousness was losing itself within the captivating and powerful emotions.

While Erica seemed to have read Godou's thoughts as she revealed a light smile.

"How is it? You still want to stop using this method and return to a more normal method of teaching?— I rather like it this way. Which one does Godou want to use? Should we continue like this, or return to some boring teaching method?"

Before realizing it, their lips had parted from one another, and even their link had weakened.

Erica relaxed her arm.

Normally, Godou would have requested for her to stop long ago. But after going this far to just stop now would be very hard. However this situation still wasn't very good.....

Erica's expression was full of joy as she stared at Godou's distress.

This devil's smile was far too alluring and hard to resist. Just as his resistance thinned and his body lost all strength...

Godou realized.

In the corner of his sight, a blushing, flustered lady stood nearby.

"Anna-san? Don't tell me Anna-san, you were there... watching the entire time?"

"I had forgotten. Anna, when did you return?"

Godou and Erica turned to look in the same direction.

Anna had been hiding behind the streetlight post, watching the pair's every move. Just from looking at Anna, it was obvious that she had been very interested in what they were doing and had been mesmerized.

"L-Let me just say this first, I wasn't peeking. I was only worried that two young people might temporarily be unable to control themselves and do something irreversible, so I had been keeping watch. Originally I was relieved to see Erica-san let Godou-san rest on her lap, but I never thought you two would be so daring! It was so embarrassing to watch....."

Anna hurriedly explained with a flustered face.

Godou could only see darkness through his eyes.

Could it be that she had seen his image just then without any holding back?

"When did we meet back up with Anna?"

"When you were still asleep. After we escaped from Athena, I had contacted her and scheduled to meet back up here. When you first woke up, Anna had just left to buy things, so you hadn't seen her."

That seemed to be the case. After a careful look, Anna was carrying coffee, red tea, and other drinks in her arms.

That was far too careless.

'If I had just thought about it, it would have been easy to realize that there was a third person here, but I had been...' — the embarrassed Godou wanted to dig a hole and bury himself in it.

"Well, if you two don't mind, please continue. You don't need to mind me; just pretend I'm not here."

"Of course. Since Anna already says that, then let's hurry back—"

"There's nothing to hurry back to, and we don't need to continue! .....I plan to return to Tokyo, so I need to bother Anna-san to drive the car. Erica you can use 'the normal way' to teach me the rest."

Godou depressingly gave his orders.

Could he really defeat Athena like this? He felt really uncertain.

Part 3

Nighttime.

Moon, stars, and darkness filled the skies; it was the Goddess Athena's favorite time.

But night-time during this era remained far too bright.

The night was filled with man-made lights. Even when looking at the sky, the light of the stars would feel weak and barely noticeable.

The fear and aversion humans had towards the darkness did not begin recently.

Within the well-lit city, Athena walked leisurely.

Although she looked to be slowly moving forward, she was doing so in a way that was impossible for humans to achieve.

Her goal was the nostalgic aura coming from the Gorgoneion.

As Athena continued to advance down the coastal road, the [Serpent]'s smell steadily grew stronger.

The time of revival was nearing. Athena's face couldn't help but reveal a smile.

Even though the staggering people she walked past would stare at her with fascination, Athena didn't care.

It was natural for humans to be fascinated by gods.

It was also natural for humans to worship gods, to convert in the name of the gods.

It was natural for humans to pray to gods, to hope for blessings in return as well.

It was just as natural for humans who meet a [Heretic God] that descended upon Earth to lose themselves, become disorderly, or go insane.

None of them deserved the slightest attention from her.

If Kusanagi Godou was here, the two of them might have to fight for their very existence; but right now, she didn't even need to worry about that.

What happened to that guy afterwards?

That recent scene reappeared within Athena's mind. Even though she defeated him with her Death Spirit, would he actually die that easily?

Most likely not; a human that could kill even a god was a godslayer.

Devil kings, archfiends, fallen angels, chaos lords, godslayers.

Since he was among those whose titles stood equal with gods, then he might be able to revive even from death.

That was fine too.

If that happened, she would just beat him by force this time; either way, she wouldn't need to defend against any more godslayers.

She could finally relax a little.

Athena's mood rose, and the traits that she carefully hid unraveled themselves.

This place was simply unbearable.

The world man created was simply far too unnatural for her.

Athena leisurely strolled through the nighttime city.

Every time she stepped forward, every time she breathed out, a light in the city will extinguish.

At first, the street lights were put out.

That was followed by homes, offices, department stores, shops, bars, neon signs, and car lights; not even flashlights and small light bulbs could avoid it.

All man-made light must disappear.

Once the hypocrisy of sunlight leaves, the city should be filled by the purity of darkness.

An endless abyss of darkness that would make it impossible to see even a few meters ahead.

Those people who noticed the abnormality gathered unhappily toward the streets.

Those on the streets could only endure their instinctive fear while looking up towards the dark skies.

Those lucky enough to return home safely were at a loss as their homes plunged into darkness.

People gathered before their homes and offices in twos and threes, shaken by their anxieties while wishing for the light that showed no signs of returning.

Their aversion to darkness.

Their yearning for light.

Humans held onto their anxiety, fear, discouragement, and weakness as they waited for the sun to reappear.

This was what night should be like.

Sensing what the people felt, Athena declared her mandate in satisfaction.

"By the decree of the true Athena. Night, reveal thyself, disperse the grace of sun, and erase the flames of Prometheus. The starry skies and dark winds shall return to recreate the ancient night."

Athena sang as she continued moving forward.

After spreading the night, only the Gorgoneion remained. That's right, she wasn't fully satisfied yet.

[Heretic God] Athena was a god of earth and darkness.

The dark, deep night without a trace of light was already revived. What remained were the strong smell and rich life of the earth.

"I seek but the Gorgoneion! Athena shall retrieve the ancient Serpent tonight!"

Every time Athena sang her divine words, bird silhouettes would appear in the skies.

Birds that continue to fly without regard for the night could only be owls.

Under dozens of flying owls, Athena continued her unstopping advance, single-mindedly chasing the scent of the Gorgoneion...

_____

An abnormality that quickly hurled the entire city into paralysis .

All lights had been extinguished regardless of their size.

All vehicles have been stopped; even trains could no longer move.

The time was just past 9pm.

Although there were fewer pedestrians than during daytime, there were still plenty of office workers and local residents.

Dragged into this situation, some people got angry, some anxiously watched their surroundings.

Some also panicked.

Anger, turmoil, panic, confusion, worry.....

Despite being plunged into darkness, as long as one kept their calm, it was easy to notice the distress of others nearby.

"This is incredible. Things are progressing far too hastily."

"Amakasu-san, your words are far too heedless, please be a little more serious."

A car that refused to budge.

As the young driver muttered to himself, Mariya Yuri reprimanded him openly.

Even though the two have only met for several hours, she already came to a realization. This Historical Compilation Committee member named Amakasu Touma didn't take things very seriously.

"Ah, I'm sorry— but in this kind of situation, whether we're serious or careless doesn't help the situation one bit. Since that's the case, then why worry more about it?"

"I'm talking about your attitude. Seriously, be it Amakasu-san or Kusanagi-san, people are far too careless, it really troubles me!"

Yuri complained as she continued to observe the situation outside.

The unnatural existence of a [Heretic God] seemed to have surfaced in the Urayasu region.

Amakasu had brought this news to Nanao Shrine around twenty minutes ago.

He was commissioned to investigate the region, so he drove Yuri from Shiba Park[1F 6] towards Tsukishima.[1F 7]

Then it happened suddenly.

The vehicle Amakasu drove suddenly underwent rapid deceleration, slowing down to little more than a pedestrian's speed , and after two minutes it stopped completely.

After looking around, they finally realized that all the streetlights were also put out, and so were all the other lights within the city.

Large numbers of stopped cars laid on the road. But unlike a traffic jam, they weren't going to move forward no matter how long they waited.

Many drivers left their cars, fidgeting anxiously as they looked around.

"Yuri-san, how about we leave the car behind and move on— waiting here won't do anything."

"Is that really alright? Just leaving the car here might cause people trouble."

"With the situation now, it's useless to worry about that— come on, let's go let's go."

Urged by Amakasu's prodding after he got off the car, Yuri also stepped out.

The two of them moved towards the sidewalk.

Their eyesight plunged into complete darkness.

Their only sources of light were those of the blurry moon and faintly visible stars.

"Darkness' domain... seems like the one who descended here was a [Heretic God] with the divine trait of the night— plus they're spreading the influence nonstop, talk about troublesome."

Amakasu grumbled nearby.

Compared to when the news first arrived, things were falling under the god's influence far too quickly.

To create such a reaching and powerful influence, as expected of Athena — the most powerful goddess of Greek Mythology.

But why would she spread darkness? Yuri couldn't understand this part.

—Yuri quivered.

No, it wasn't the chills, but because as a hime-miko, she felt the presence of a god approaching.

She thought of the 'Gorgoneion' that was placed on the obsidian badge in Nanao Shrine.

It was the powerful will to find an important item.

There was no mistake; this was a sign that the [Heretic God] was closing in on the presence of the artifact.

Yuri shivered.

That place was in danger; just like insects attracted by light, Athena will eventually reach Gorgoneion's location. That was an easily expected scenario.

"Amakasu-san, we must leave this place. We must leave this dark area and return to Nanao Shrine. I must return to protect the [Gorgoneion] I spoke to you about."

"You mean the item that's similar to Medusa, I understand. But, this stage really is grand. Now, if that devil king Yuri-san acknowledges to be true — Kusanagi Godou, would arrive, then all the actors will be assembled."

"That's why I say, you're being far too heedless!"

The two of them continued to walk through the darkness without any light to guide them.

Amakasu's footsteps did not show the slightest hesitation, as if he was already used to the darkness.

Yuri took each step carefully as she followed the only road sign — Amakasu's shadow, and even then she would occasionally find herself almost tripping.

Just the disappearance of light from the city could cause such inconvenience to everybody.

The utter darkness exerted an unbearable pressure, bringing people endless fear.

Chapter 6 - Whirlwind in the Darkest Night

Part 1

Yuri and Amakasu spent dozens of minutes before they escaped from the area of pitch darkness.

They were lucky enough to stop a taxi that hadn't noticed the abnormality of the area yet, and managed to return to the Nanao Shrine beside Shiba Park.

Within the premises of this shrine was a simple, single-story service building.

Yuri had kept the Gorgoneion for safekeeping inside this place. It was a room that had been especially prepared for her, so she could use it freely.

She left Amakasu waiting outside in the courtyard before entering the service building herself.

When she returned with the Gorgoneion, Amakasu was reporting their current situation through his cell phone, to whom was likely to be a member of the History Compilation Committee on the other side.

"So the artifact that's causing the problem is the Representation of the Serpent; talk about a troublesome item."

Amakasu said after hanging up his phone around three minutes later.

The meeting with Kusanagi Godou, the appearance of the self-claimed lover from Italy, and the arrival of the Goddess Athena—Amakasu had reported all of these recent events.

Everything had developed so quickly that Amakasu had revealed just how much of a 'do things my way' attitude he had.

But even though he was someone like that, he was still an agent of the History Compilation Committee.

To understand sorcery to some degree, trained in a few martial arts, and be knowledgeable about supernatural and deific matters of past and present... it was expected for him to be like that.

"I still can't believe that an artifact like the Gorgoneion had been excavated from Africa; it's just too odd considering its connections with a Greek goddess."

Yuri asked without any expectations.

She only hoped to receive some hints that might lead to an answer.

"Oh no, it's not strange at all. Plato[1G 1] once wrote in his dialogues that 'the Greek Goddess Athena and Libyan Goddess Neith were the same deity'."

"Plato's dialogues?"

As she watched Amakasu answer her effortlessly, Yuri couldn't help but see him in a new light.

As expected of a member of the History Compilation Committee, his wealth of knowledge far exceeded that of her own.

"Correct, if I remember right it was in the Timaeus[IG 2]. It was a well-known story in ancient Greece. Even Herodotus[IG 3] once wrote something similar, that 'most Greek Gods had been adopted from foreign countries'.

Yuri felt admiration as she listened to his explanations.

As a miko, Yuri had received some western cultural education. But even though she was far more knowledgeable than other girls of her age, she still didn't know much about Classical Greek culture.

"Of the Greek Pantheon, many of the deities were assembled from various parts of the ancient world. Their places of origin included Egypt, Libya, Babylonia, Syria, and many others. It was the result of merging many regional and ethnic gods into their own mythology."

"That's how... I didn't know at all."

"Don't worry; this is a lacking for Japanese in general. Because we've always been a closed island country, we're rather oblivious to the cultural changes brought in by immigration. For example, even the one Kusanagi defeated, Verethragna, could trace its origins to the bible."

"Ehh!? Really?"

The Persian God of War that supposedly had ten forms.

How did such a god from Central Asia appear in the world's most famous book?

Strictly speaking, it would be an ancestor of that god. I once mentioned that Verethragna had been equated with Heracles[1G 4] as a god of victory. But Heracles had been a god created by unifying several other gods, and his oldest source would be Ba'al[1G 5], the storm god and ruling deity of Canaan[1G 6].

"So are you saying that the African god Neite was later referred to as Athena... like that?"

Amakasu revealed a vague smile to her question.

"About that, who knows? Regarding something like this, I don't think I should comment on it when I'm just a layman. Honestly, this is a difficult part of Athena; the goddess had a profound link with not only Neite but also Medusa."

"I remember the one who defeated Medusa was Perseus, the hero who received divine protection from Athena."

Yuri thought of the renowned story from Greek mythology.

With dozens of snakes as her hair and the ability to petrify people with her gaze, Medusa had met her death when Perseus cut off her head and offered it to Athena.

"That mythology introduced the relationship between Medusa and Athena. Did you know that Athena had always kept the severed head of Medusa with her after receiving it as an offering? Ever since ancient times, the shield of Athena[1G 7] would almost always include a portrait of Medusa.

Medusa had stayed in this form beside Athena ever since.

It wasn't appropriate to call them partners; more like strong bonds of fate had linked them with one another.

"Incidentally, if you trace Medusa's origin, you'll find that she was an earth goddess that came from Africa. She really wasn't a monster."

Deities from other cultures were often introduced as evil mythological monsters to suppress their status. Of course, they were always defeated in the end.

Legends of defeating evil and vanquishing monsters like that could be seen everywhere in mythology.

"Furthermore, Athena was also linked to many other goddesses other than Medusa. There were simply far too many in similar roles."

"What do you mean by similar roles?"

Yuri asked Amakasu, who was normally too lazy to explain.

The subject had digressed completely from the main topic.

Even though she knew this, she still felt that the current topic was of unparalleled importance. Not because of curiosity, but because her miko instincts were warning her so.

"Goddesses with names similar to Athena also come from Southern Europe, Northern Africa, and Orient regions bordering the Mediterranean like Turkey and Syria; the number of gods who share the same name as her are unnaturally high. There's Athena, Atana, Atona, Anata, Asherat, Aset, Ath-enna, and so and so on. Even Ba'al, whom I just mentioned, had a goddess of war sister named Anat, also a similar name."

"Goddess of war... sister..."

Yuri's mind couldn't stop spinning.

The Pantheon ruler's sister, daughter, and wife. The Goddess of War. The Serpent Goddess. The Goddess of Life.

"All those names that seem similar in pronunciation and linguistics cannot be disregarded either. Although they were originally the same name, they continue to circulate between different cultures, becoming more enriched every time... that's the way we ought to think of them."

A bitter smile appeared on Amakasu's expression; maybe he thought they had gone off on a tangent for too long.

"Some say that Athena was the embodiment of owls; this spreading darkness probably had something to do with that. I had just asked for an investigative report from the scene during my phone call.

"The scene—you mean within the darkness zone?"

"Yes. Athena was currently moving towards the central Tokyo expressways through the Chiba region. Her goal must be that Gorgoneion, spreading her darkness across the area while moving and calling upon flocks of owls... they'll be in like a typhoon."

Just after Amakasu nonchalantly made a joke.

The premises of Nanao Shrine was completely enveloped in darkness.

Even though this place was encircled by the woods, it was still in the heart of the city, and the skyscrapers that surrounded the area were always bright sources of light.

Other than the street lights, there were also dazzling neon lights from the department stores.

Normally, this place would be brightly lit even in the dead of night. But right now, the darkness that encompassed the area felt endlessly deep and impossibly dark.

Only a half-moon was left in the skies to shine hazily upon the ground.

"Ah, this place has already fallen under the goddess' influence... since things have gotten like this, we can only pray that the devil king would step in quickly, otherwise this will become impossible to handle."

Amakasu muttered to himself within the darkness-covered shrine.

Part 2

"This is the god of darkness' presence... and the Gorgoneion with the imprint of the serpent was an artifact associated with the earth. So the goddess that governed both earth and darkness..."

Yuri looked towards the skies from within the shrine.

The night before her was darker than black pearls.

"Owls are the messengers of Athena; they are birds of misfortune that only appeared during the night, and are considered bringers of ill-omen. But they are also sacred birds worshiped as symbols of wisdom, and had represented both sanctity and calamity since ancient times. Putting 'snake' together with 'owl' —just how do we interpret that?"

Amakasu muttered unhappily.

Although his figure couldn't be seen, both his sound and breath were very close.

There were also other people within the shrine who had sensed the abnormality and fled to this place.

It made them seem unreliable, but that couldn't be helped; there weren't many people within this country who could stand up to a [Heretic God].

Even those of them who were close were at a loss over what to do.

Yuri couldn't help but tremble.

Originally, humans were supposed to fear the night, but ever since the advent of lighting, humans had mostly discarded this fear, but it was still a natural instinct.

It was the same a while ago, when they had to use a lot of effort to escape the area of darkness.

To walk under faint traces of moonlight, guided only by keeping a hand on nearby walls and railings, even a completely normal path would seem distressing.

People huddled closer together with one another during the dark night regardless of where they came from.

"See, we can still do something as long as there's some light."

Suddenly, a warm, orange light ignited.

Amakasu had used his lighter, but the flame was immediately extinguished.

"To give off light—that meant the fire lost strength, right?"

"Correct, a frighteningly powerful darkness trait... as expected of a [Heretic God]."

Regardless of the era and country, humans will always bestow names and mythology upon gods.

Powerful gods not only threatened man, but also belittled people.

They were still nameless during prehistoric times.

But mankind soon found the presence of gods between heaven and earth, viewing hurricanes and floods as the gods' anger, and worshiping powerful, dangerous beasts as their incarnations.

Over the passing of the ages, people would name the gods and weave all sorts of myths around them.

For example, the earth creator El; the war god Ogmios; the goddess of wilderness Artemis.[1G 8]

Or the battle and blacksmithing god Ogoun; the berserker god of destruction Tezcatlipoca.[1G 9]

There was also the heavenly wanderer Susanoo; the god of twelve incarnations Vishnu.[1G 10]

They were as numerous as the stars.

All of them originating from the hands of man.

One could say that this was a ritual created by man to ward off the overwhelming might of the gods.

The gods who received names and mythology should not stray too far. Whether it was granting favors or taking revenge, these gods should not exceed the scope of their authority.

Thus, it was possible for people to respond to the threats and blessings of gods.

However, if a god wanted to exceed their name or the meanings behind their mythology.

If they returned to their original form, before they were bound by the limitations of mythology.

Such a god would be named a [Heretic God].

After turning their backs on the mythology given to them by humans, they would descend upon the world. Some circulated between the nations that granted them their name, while others drifted to faraway lands.

Regardless of which, [Heretic Gods] would bring disaster upon mankind.

If a sun god descends, the world would become unbearably hot.

If a sea god descends, the world would be swallowed by the ocean and sunk underwater.

If an underworld god descends, pestilence will spread through the world, bringing death to every city.

If a judgment god descends, the people will receive all sorts of penalties and punishments.

Bringing forth unbalance and change merely by journeying across a world, these gods of calamity acted on their whims and sought to create their own status—they were the [Heretic Gods].

"But the darkness just now didn't just snuff out light, it even stopped the vehicles; how did that happen? Thankfully there were no catastrophes, but..."

Yuri prompted her earlier question once again.

Motor vehicles traveling across an expressway that suddenly lost all lighting were bound to cause accidents.

If every district Athena went across became like this—just thinking about it was scary.

"Lucky break caught within this misfortune. The darkness banished both light and fire, so everything relying on these two stopped working. Athena's power shut off not only the lights, but also vehicle engines; some car accidents are still inevitable, but thankfully they aren't tragedies."

Amakasu then listed all the items still capable of releasing light or fire—in addition to lighting, equipment that used gas or oil were also unusable.

However, phones, wireless equipment, and devices like air conditioners could still function normally.

The darkness had already swallowed between one-third to half of Edogawa, Koto, and Central Tokyo districts, and was now expanding into the port district.

Under its influence, Tokyo's east city metro had also been stopped.

"...Even though this was to be expected, isn't this a little too exaggerated?"

"Since Athena isn't a hateful, evil god, even though she brings trouble upon us, nothing catastrophic should happen. With her power, spreading mass destruction won't be hard at all... so it's only a matter of time how long this will keep up."

Amakasu's worries were spot on.

They needed to resolve this quickly.

However, Yuri's inner doubts were growing.

Several hours ago, Kusanagi Godou had left to meet the goddess Athena, but he still hadn't returned. Instead, Athena had come to Tokyo.

She not only revealed herself, but was also wreaking havoc.

Her actions were far too careless. What if there was a godslayer nearby? Shouldn't she be a little more careful?

"Unless, Kusanagi-san had already lost to Athena?"

Yuri felt uneasy, worried that something like that might have happened.

Even though he had the power of the devil king, he didn't seem reliable at all—Godou merely looked like a student of her age, with nothing special about him.

Before she met his true face, she had felt anxiety, fear, and even the urge to run away.

But afterwards, forget anxious, she had felt relief instead, and even ended up lecturing him, telling him to be more cautious.

Towards the opposite sex, no, even to those of the same gender, she had never spoken words like that.

When she was with Godou, her emotions felt inexplicably relaxed, and then become careless—maybe there was something similar between her and Godou.

Thanks to her sixth sense, Yuri could usually tell if she could get along with someone upon their first meeting.

As soon as she thought of that, she started shaking her head.

He already had such a lowlife for a lover, so she definitely shouldn't get close to him. Yes, definitely, even if the world was flipped upside down.

"—F-first we should try to reach that person. Amakasu-san, could you lend me your cell phone please."

"Of course, go ahead. If possible, could you request him to help us defeat Athena? Eh, we already don't have any other solution left ."

He didn't even wait for a response before putting his rectangular cell phone in Yuri's hands.

It was uncertain if it was due to Athena's influence, but the LCD screen seemed bleaker than usual. But according to Amakasu, its talk functions should work normally.

When they separated, Godou had written his cell phone number down on a piece of paper and given it to Yuri.

Since she had already memorized it, dialing it had been quick... after a few rings a response came.

[Eh~~?]

"It's me, Mariya. Kusanagi-san? Where are you right now!?"

Yuri called out after hearing a familiar voice.

[Eh... around the Kasai Arakawa area. All cars and metro have stopped. Oh yeah, something I need to report, Athena is moving towards the Gorgoneion, and any place she passes by will render light and fire unusable, so be careful.]

"I already know about that. What are you doing right now? Is Athena already in the port district!?"

[....It's a shame but, Athena had gotten the better of me; I have just returned from death's door.]

"Death's door!? Are you okay? If you can't move, I'll go get—"

Yuri was distraught over the sudden and serious development.

Yuri's intuition told her this wasn't a joke, that Godou wasn't the type to make jokes at moments like these. She wasn't sure why, but that's what she believed.

[Ah, I'm alright, don't worry. Did you know? My body is unbelievably tough; there's no way I'd die that easily. Besides, I could use this to lie to people.]

"Lies—please stop saying stupid things. After receiving such a serious injury you still run around all over the place; that's way too reckless, even if Kusanagi-san's body was stronger than usual..."

Yuri couldn't help but get worried, and ended up divining him.

She had a feeling that something might happen if she left this guy alone. Yet, Godou's next comment had eased Yuri's worries.

[Kay, it should be fine since I'm no ordinary human, so you don't need to worry. But there's something I need your help with. It's fine if you want to refuse, but please hear me out first.]

"...What is it? Is it something I can do?"

[Yes, more like I can only rely on Mariya-san for this. But it's really dangerous, so I really should ask for your answer—but if you could, please wait and ambush Athena.]

"Ambush!?"

Ambush the powerful [Heretic God] —Athena.

That was simply suicidal. Just what did Godou Kusanagi want from her?

[If Athena gets near your place, just call my name. This way, I should immediately fly to where you are—I think.]

"Fly?... Is that another one of Kusanagi-san's powers?"

[Yea, should be. If someone who knows me by face calls for me, then I can fly to that person's side—I think that's how the power works.]

"...You keep saying uncertain words like 'should' or 'I think', did I hear wrongly?"

Since Yuri felt odd about it, so she asked Kusanagi.

[Eh, actually I'm not sure, since the conditions still need to be verified, and even then it may not work every time. But it seems to be that we need to know each other's appearance, realize that the other has fallen into danger, and both be exposed to the outside winds... I think satisfying these conditions should allow me to use it.]

"You sure?"

[I think so... I just don't know how much danger the other side has to be in, but I think meeting a god should qualify.]

"Why would anyone agree to such a dangerous and uncertain thing!"

[Yeah, I thought so as well. Sorry for making an unreasonable request. It just doesn't seem like we can catch up to Athena, so I've been trying to figure out another way... are you in any danger? Forget the Gorgoneion, just get away from there and leave Athena to me.]

Godou gave a straightforward reply just as Yuri became anxious again.

Kusanagi-san didn't want to do this either.

But if they didn't use such a method, it would be very hard for him to catch up to Athena, Yuri just realized.

If it was something that must be done, and it was something that only she could do—

Then didn't that mean she had to do it?

"I understand; I'll wait here with the Gorgoneion until Athena comes... I'll definitely call your name; you have to come; I don't want to die in a place like this."

Death, that wasn't an exaggeration at all.

Meeting such a powerful [Heretic God], who knows what could happen. It was possible Yuri would lose her sanity just by meeting her eyes.

Such was the difference between humans and gods.

[...Really? Mariya-san, even though I requested this, please don't make any rash decisions.]

"There isn't any other way, right? If there is, you wouldn't make such a request. Even though you're a frustrating person, you aren't the type to play this kind of cruel joke."

[Eh, I'm happy that you can say that, but we only met today. Is it alright for you to trust me like this?]

"I am a hime-miko of Musashino after all. I know these kinds of things—I'm only going to help you this once, so you better get here quickly."

Yuri hung up the call without waiting for a reply.

If she heard any more arguments from him, the firm resolution she mustered might start to waver.

Would Godou Kusanagi keep his promise? Yuri's intuition didn't have an answer.

Yuri suddenly raised her head.

She just noticed that Amakasu and everyone in the shrine had gathered around her.

"...Yuri-san, when did you get so close to Godou Kusanagi?"

"Amakasu-san, please don't joke like that. Just when did we sound 'close' during that conversation. Anyhow, I must bring the Gorgoneion to outside the shrine."

Facing the surprised Amakasu, Yuri faintly countered.

"Kusanagi-san has the power to return here, but I have to become his guide. However, we can't lure Athena here; we have to draw her towards somewhere with less people—so everyone, please take care of things afterwards."

Yuri ordered with all the dignity of a hime-miko.

Although she said it respectfully, it was still an order. There was no room for refusal.

"That's way too risky; let me lure Athena in."

Amakasu suggested.

Under Yuri's powerful glare, everyone had kept their silence, with the exception of this man.

"No, Amakasu-san won't be able to call Kusanagi-san here. Only I can fulfill this condition, therefore I must go alone."

Since the opponent was Athena, it was useless to bring more people; going alone should at least avoid any unnecessary casualties.

Yuri smiled faintly as she tried to reassure Amakasu.

"Everything will be fine; Kusanagi-san promised he will come. That person will only keep his promises in this kind of situation, that's what my intuition says."

Part 3

Yuri hurried through the streets enclosed by darkness.

She could only rely upon the moonlight, starlight, and her eyes, which had finally gotten used to the darkness.

Normally it would be bright even during the night.

Along the commerce streets, there would always be light pouring from the windows of high-rises, as well as many street lamps lighting the way.

But now, there weren't any man-made lights.

Utter darkness had overwhelmed the entire area.

Looking down at the hands of her watch, it was already 11pm.

There wasn't a single person around.

Without any night shift workers, the number of people wandering around shopping streets late at night would be far less than those around during daytime. But there were also residents living nearby, and there should also be some people still on the way home from overtime jobs.

It shouldn't be this lifeless and desolate.

Everyone had stayed within their homes or their workplaces, awaiting the arrival of morning.

Even if they came outside, only an endless abyss of darkness awaited them.

In these conditions where not even flashlights worked, the only person who dared wander around outside was only Yuri herself.

These streets were supposed to be familiar.

Normally, there would be no way to get lost here, but tonight was different.

Yuri kept her hands on the structures and railings to ascertain the situation before her, advancing under conditions where she wasn't even sure of what was just a few meters ahead.

Under these circumstances, her sense of direction was completely useless.

It was no longer possible to grasp just where she was.

Yuri continued to walk like a blinded insect. Her goal was a place with even less people than the commercial street - Tokyo Bay .

Within the bag in her hands she carried the Gorgoneion.

Just carrying that already made it impossible to escape the pitch black city, which had already fallen into Athena's grasp.

But Yuri wanted to bring the fight between Godou Kusanagi and the goddess to a sparse area before they begin. She focused all of her thoughts on this, and it was the only thing that kept her going through these dark streets by herself.

Since Yuri still wore her miko outfit, many curious onlookers would have focused their sight on her during any normal night.

But right now, there wasn't a single pair of curious eyes.

Yuri suddenly felt an inexplicable sense of loneliness, just as she was about to cross the road.

The situation had caused everyone to abandon their cars and flee, so there was no need to mind traffic laws.

Yet, someone called Yuri to a stop from behind.

"—Thou miko who servest the unknown gods, hand over the relic of the [Serpent]."

The night lay quiet.

The night was surrounded by unnatural stillness and silence.

The voice was like the night wind, leaving the silent night undisturbed.

"Athena is my name. Daughter of Zeus, traveler of the side, coming to retrieve the [Serpent] in thine hands. For disrespect toward followers of foreign gods, one must apologize now."

Filled with an aura of divinity, the overwhelming presence closed in one step at a time.

She looked around.

One glance was all she needed to realize that the slowly approaching girl was Athena.

Immersed by the moonlight, the goddess looked thin and slim, yet emanated unusually powerful might.

Her hair billowed in the night breeze, pouring off the sense of ill-fortune.

Strands and strands of sparkling silver hair seemed like countless snakes within Yuri's eyes.

"Ancient [Serpent]—finally found; with this one can return to being the old Athena, the defiant Athena. Miko, take one's story of three goddesses awakening within one and carry it down to the ears of future generations."

Athena merely extended her tiny palm forward.

With just that, the bag in Yuri's hands sprang open, the Gorgoneion inside flew to Athena's hands.

"Such is the ancient [Serpent], one finally retrieved one's past."

Athena smiled faintly.

Albeit the engulfing darkness, Yuri could clearly sense her joy.

Then, the goddess sang towards the skies:

One sings, the carol of the trinity goddess. Connecting skies, earth with darkness, reincarnation with wisdom.

One sings, the melody of the demoted goddess. Born as queen yet seen as snake of forbiddance, to the queen's grievance.

One sings, the ballad of the traumatized goddess. Disgraced by the esteemed father, fell to humiliation as the mother.

One named Athena, daughter of Zeus, patron of Athens, maiden of eternity.

Past, is the nurturing earth mother of all things!

Past, is the dark mistress of the underworld!

Past, is the spreading of heavenly wisdom from the enlightened goddess!

One pledges, Athena shall soon return to the Athena of origin!

Divine songs weaved forth from the mouth of Athena.

Like hymn, like prayer, like praise.

With the chant's continuation, Athena's figure began to change.

Her height increased, her limbs lengthened, and the looks of a delicate girl gave away to a lady of divine excellence.

The immaturity vanished from her features.

From appearances alone, she looked like she was seventeen or eighteen, her modern clothes having transformed to white robes of antiquity.

"Defiant... Athena—!"

Seeing Athena at such a close range, Yuri's instincts realized Athena's nature.

Here was the descendant of mother earth.

Here was the dominating leader of death and gloom.

Here was the forlorn goddess of the skies, the earth, and the darkness.

Even so, she must still be resisted, because this street was not owned by the gods, but built by the people, as a city for humankind.

"Athena! Please stop joking. You still have an opponent here!"

Yuri ignored her trembling body, frightened by the prospect of challenging a god, and shouted with all her strength.

"O miko, thy words amusest me. Speakest his name, for one may think the same."

"The one to fight you is the personification of godslaying, one recognized as a king of mages—Kusanagi Godou! Until you defeat him, please stop abusing your powers and causing trouble as you please!"

Facing the amused Athena, Yuri suppressed her fear to answer.

Yuri had received the special education of a hime-miko since childhood, so she understood divine might more than anyone. Despite this, she continued on without holding back:

—No.

Her trembling wasn't caused by fear.

Yuri realized that her temperature was dropping, because she stood near the Athena who now had the Gorgonieon.

Affected by the chill of the underworld that spread from the goddess, Yuri's body was nearing its death.

"Ah... truly apologetic; although one retrieved the strength of antiquity, full control has yet to be regained."

Athena's voice contained her amusement.

Compared to earlier, the spiritual power held within her words were immeasurably stronger.

"Yet, this baptism by death's breath, thou receivest not alone. Kusanagi Godou has already experienced. If he can escape the abyss of death to stand before one, one may yet grant thy wish—"

"If that's so, then there's no problem. That person is still alive. For my sake—definitely, to protect me, he will definitely arrive soon! Just watch!"

Her legs were trembling so much that even standing was difficult.

Yet Yuri continued to stand with all her strength.

She hadn't received a response from Kusanagi-san; she only told him to hurry here before hanging up the call.

Plus, she didn't know if his power could actually be used.

If it could, Godou Kusanagi would fly here. If not, she would hopelessly die here.

Just which was it? Should she trust him? Should she not?

Casting aside all confusion, Yuri shouted with all her strength:

"Kusanagi-san! Kusanagi Godou! Come! Athena and I are here! Hurry up—your strength is needed now. Hurry!"

The wind began to blow.

The gentle night breeze quickly rose to a mild wind, then grew to a powerful whirlwind.

Athena was stunned.

Within the whirlwind stood the figure that caused her expression.

—Kusanagi Godou

Kusanagi Godou had arrived with the wind.

Her sight had connected with his sharp eyes.

As Yuri saw the devil king that was her age, she collapsed onto the ground as her knees gave out below her.

The most surprising thing was, Yuri wasn't nervous at all.

No matter how immature he was, no matter how troublesome he was, he would accomplish what he had to do.

Protect those weaker than him, rescue his friends from danger—without such a will, it would be impossible for a normal person to receive the Campione title.

Godou would definitely come.

That was what her intuition had told her, and she calmly nodded towards Godou with her trust.

Part 4

Before this, Godou had been at the West Kasai station.

Athena sought the Gorgoneion, so she should be moving towards the Nanao Shrine, thus he rode Anna's crazy car once again, hoping to return to Tokyo in haste the entire time. But...

Kasai area had already fallen under Athena's influence.

"I sleep for just a bit and this happens, such a troublesome goddess."

Godou complained.

Within this district consumed by darkness, lighting equipment and cars were unusable.

As they arrived on the edge of Kasai, Anna sharply stopped her hellishly fast car. Although he had been lucky to stay alive, he must still press on.

Vehicles lined up around them, every one of them disabled; they were no different than steel boxes with wheels.

"Eh, regarding the relationship between owls and Athena... because they were birds of wisdom, so they became the messengers for the goddess of wisdom... right?"

A tiny shadow flew past just as Godou looked out the window.

Since he had very good night vision, he knew it was an owl.

Most Japanese had only seen those birds on illustrations or on TV, so these were probably summoned by the silver-haired goddess.

Athena seemed to have the alias of 'Brilliant Goddess'.

Meaning 'one whose eyes sparkled with light'.

But Godou had finally realized that this alias really meant 'one who possessed the eyes of an owl'.

"That's not all. The nocturnal owls were seen by people of ancient times as the embodiment of the death gods, who traveled from the underworld to the real world. So of course they would also become the servants of Athena, who had once been a god of the netherworld."

Erica responded smoothly.

...So that was how it is. Godou's felt like an examinee who only knew half the answer.

"You can't defeat Athena if you don't even know something of this level. We've been rushing so much that I didn't get to teach you much this entire time."

"N-no, that's alright; the current situation is way too disastrous."

Godou hastily separated himself from the disgruntled Erica.

Thanks to his partner, Godou at least learned quite a bit of knowledge regarding Athena.

The information passed into his mind through [Endowment] will eventually disappear, but it should at least stay for one day, so there were no immediate problems.

The problem was that the information wasn't complete.

It was probably enough to summon the [Warrior] form, but not completely, and there was no way to bring [Sword] to its full potential.

Because the car was shaking violently, it had been impossible for him to concentrate on the learning.

"Anyhow, Anna-san, I'll get off here, thank you very much."

Godou thanked her as he opened the rear door and got out.

He would get to Nanao Shrine even if he had to walk there; it was better than shuffling about here.

"Alright, I wish you good luck. Godou-san, please return safely. If you do, I'll make delicious meals for you again!"

"I can't wait already; I'll have to trouble you then."

Anna bid goodbye to Godou with a smile. She really was a lady that served knights.

Even at a moment like this, there were no tears in her eyes, only hearty smiles as she made promises for next time.

"...I'll say this now, if you wish to eat Arianna's personally cooked meals, you have to go alone; I won't be tagging along."

Erica said after following Godou out of the car and moving to stand beside him, with an expression that claimed her response is to be expected.

Her serious tone made Godou's feelings waver.

"That's to say, you once said that she couldn't stew vegetables; is it really that bad?"

"No, Arianna's cooking is very good, but if you let her make pot stew then it'll be dangerous, guaranteed to give you an

unprecedented feeling of peril. Since it would be a meal to celebrate your victorious return, of course it would be a hot pot stew[IG 11]."

Erica, who was afraid of neither gods nor devils, was this cautious in regards to Anna's meals.

It must be really serious.

But, rather than worrying about a meal in the future, they should be worrying over the situation right now. Erica and Godou continued to walk, neither of them bothered by the darkness.

"...Anyhow, seems like Athena had already started doing whatever she wants."

"Maybe it's because she already won once, so she no longer feels the need to guard herself against you."

They walked down the pitch black streets one step at a time; this was going to be a boring journey.

—Or not.

As Erica moved closer to Godou, he changed his mind. With this person around, it was impossible to be bored.

"To stop Athena's brutality, we should make more preparations for the [Warrior]. So let's get back to what we were doing."

"No need! This is already enough. You see, I'm not going to fight, I'm just going to negotiate for her to leave, so I only need enough to make her wary of me."

"You're far too naive. You think Athena will care about any weapon that couldn't kill her?"

"If you really believe that, then tell me some more about Athena ."

"No, too bothersome. Godou, why don't you just say that you want my lips; do it passionately, let my heart flutter. Come on, hurry~~"

"There's no way I can say something so embarrassing! If our foe wants to bring trouble to these streets, we could use [White Stallion], we can do something either way!"

Earlier, Godou could vaguely feel the direction towards [East].

It was an instinctive feel, like that of migratory birds.

This made it possible to use Verethragna's third incarnation. But even though he could, it wasn't a power he wanted to use, since it was an overwhelmingly powerful technique.

Therefore Godou was able to calmly reject Erica's tempting jokes.

Even though it was better to have more armaments, it couldn't be helped. That preparatory method was far too exhilarating in

Kusanagi Godou's opinion, and could only be used with considerable emotional readiness.

—The two of them continued to talk as they walked.

As they arrived at the West Kasai station, they realized that the place was even more rowdy than usual.

There were far more people than any other place here.

Since the metro stopped, many people were stuck and couldn't settle down.

Since nobody knew how the power cut, the East-West line and the Sobu line were both temporarily stopped, while station workers and security tried to explain the situation using their microphones.

People in the middle of their way home gathered about, anxiously listening for an explanation.

"Power outage; that excuse is stretching it."

"Forget it, at least radios and phones still work, but how are they going to explain this if this happened in Italy or Europe?"

Erica and Godou chatted as they watched the gathering crowds.

Gods who descended and revealed themselves always brought odd phenomenons about. To normal people who knew nothing of mages, this was nothing less than a disaster.

"They could claim it's a tornado, earthquake, or viral outbreak, and warn everyone to stay inside. But regardless of the explanation, people will always sense that something was abnormal, even after they calm down."

"Sense?"

"Europe—especially Southern Europe, Eastern Europe, and England, are all places where magic is widespread, and could be considered the homeland of the devil kings. If a [Heretic God] or godslayer appeared, it would be known quickly, because there would be tons of unusual events."

Even in Europe, mages wouldn't dare expose such events openly.

But most cities had secret organizations similar to Erica's [Copper Black Cross], and most people connected to magic had an organization they belonged to.

There were many people within the cities who knew of how to connect with these organizations.

Erica said that they would spread their knowledge on how to recognize other mages, as well as their fear of gods and godslayers, through the cities as rumors and folklore.

"But won't Tokyo become like Europe in the future? After all, Godou was here, and now even a [Heretic God] has come."

"I don't want the people of Tokyo to become aware of such things."

Godou replied nonchalantly as he wondered if there was a shortcut to Nanao Shrine.

Without any other means of mobility, he could only rely upon Verethragna's power.

"...Of course the best method is to use [Wind] power, but I still don't completely understand it, so I'd rather not use it."

Verethragna was a god of victory, yet also a god that dominated over kings.

Under the widespread worship of Parthian and Sassanid Empires[TG 12] in ancient Persia, Verethragna had become a patron saint of the people. Yet the incarnation that most represented Verethragna was [Wind].

Transforming into a gust of wind to protect the people—especially travelers.

It was said that ancient Persians would often recite the prayers of Verethragna to pray for a safe journey, or place small figures of him on the streets for protection.

"Can someone call upon you by using the power of [Wind]?"

"I think only Mariya-san can, although I don't want to give her any trouble. What should I do...!?"

Just as he answered Erica, Godou's cell phone began to ring.

"Eh?"

[It's me, Mariya. Kusanagi-san? Where are you right now!?]

Just as he spoke of Mariya, the actual person called him.

After reporting his status, he wanted to see if he could obtain Mariya's help, yet she unexpectedly agreed.

Even though he was relying on Mariya, he could only accept success from himself right now. Failure was unacceptable, and the responsibility was heavy.

"Was the call from that woman?"

Erica asked Godou who was looking glum.

"Don't say 'that woman'; her name is Mariya Yuri, say her name properly."

"I know I know... her name should be Bait. I never thought that girl would have so much courage."

"You say it's courage, but I think it's more like her sense of responsibility... I regret it now. I really shouldn't have said anything. If she dies in vain like this, I'll have to carry a cross on my back for the rest of my life."

I could imagine Mariya Yuri sighing deeply while taking it upon herself when no one else was in the position to play such a potentially disastrous role.

It was because she was a very serious girl with a strong sense of responsibility.

Although they had only met for a short time, he had a very clear understanding of this fact.

"Hey, Godou, I guess I should take this opportunity to tell you something. Despite how I look, I'm a very generous and open-minded girl."

"What? I really don't have time for chitchats right now."

"I'm just offering you my generosity. Although I'm your lover, I could still turn a blind eye if you want a second lover. You're still young, so it's not surprising for you to be attracted to other girls."

Erica spoke these strange words.

Just what was she talking about?

"Wait a second. I don't even *have* a wife... could you speak frankly?"

"Then I'll be blunt, you should try to make that Mariya girl your second lover. She really is a rare talent, has a compatible personality with you, not to mention plenty of courage. You should spend some time developing her, you know?"

"...What?"

Godou froze as he stared at Erica.

The blond devil was advising him with a completely serious face.

"It's rare to find such a powerful spiritual seer... later on, if we have to fight a god whose origin we don't know, that girl's spiritual sight would be able to read the god's various divine attributes. She's a gifted individual that would make your [Sword] even more effective, so make sure you don't lose her."

"Don't joke about something like that! How can I ask Mariya to do that kind of thing!"

"I'm serious, otherwise who would make this kind of stale joke? Ah, I'll state up front, she can only be your second lover at most. No matter when it is or who it is, your number one lover should always be me—Erica Blandelli, remember? If you forget, I won't forgive you."

Erica nagged on as she held onto Godou's hand.

I didn't know why, but my feelings felt like they were just captured by a pair of cuffs.

"If you forget... I think I will definitely kill you, so *never ever* forget that. I may be generous, but I am not patient."

Erica said as she smiled softly.

Unlike her usual devilish grin, her smile was completely innocent.

Godou found this cute smile deathly terrifying; it was so innocent that it only made him feel like he would truly be in mortal peril.

"Eh, wait up. Haven't you already attacked me seriously before! "

"That was merely a game. If I really hate you, I'll definitely seize just the right moment to kill you. There will be no escape, followed by a single sure-kill strike. Simple, isn't it?"

Erica moved even closer as she continued to speak.

Godou hurriedly pushed Erica aside, an act of immaturity as his fear overcame his conscience.

"D-don't say stupid things and leave me; I'm going to use the [Wind] power now. Since I'm still unfamiliar with this incarnation, I need to concentrate."

Godou sat down on the nearby railing.

He closed his eyes and focused his thoughts.

He must make his ears more sensitive than ever, not to miss a single sound from the distance.

A middle-aged man complained angrily about the metro being stopped.

A small child was crying.

The people nearby were comforting him.

A person was whining to the police about a completely unrelated matter.

—Godou ignored these voices. What he needed to hear weren't these sounds, but a voice from far away, the voice of someone he must protect.

How can I let such a serious and nice person die? I must save her, I must hear the sound of her call.

What I needed the most now was concentration. The greatest concentration, to leave not a single voice unheard.

I must succeed.

He had never lost to a single person since he started playing baseball.

There were plenty who were much better at batting, and just as many who were better at scoring homeruns; but he was usually the 4th batter, the one who would win the game.

Step up to the plate when it's your time to bat.

To make the impossible possible, to focus all concentration forward even when facing insurmountable hardship...

"Kusanagi-san! Kusanagi Godou! Come! Athena and I are here! Hurry up—your strength is needed now. Hurry!"

Godou finally caught the voice as it flew across.

The shout that originated from far away.

He stood up from the ground. All conditions had been cleared.

Verethragna's first incarnation, [Wind].

Legends said the war god had appeared as a body of fierce winds before the Prophet Zarathustra[TG 13] and spoke to him: thou art strongest, thou leadest an invincible army of the battlefield, capable of destroying any human or demon who dare show hostility.

"Let's go, Erica! Hold on tight!"

Godou called his partner over as he transformed into the embodiment of the [Wind]

Tornado-like winds coiled beneath his feet.

Catching onto Erica's hand as she leaped over, the two soared into the air.

"—Thou art alive still, no, thou hast finally awakened, Kusanagi Godou, with true power to behold! Now worthy of being one's hated foe! With the unspeakable title of the devil king!"

He could hear Athena's prayer-like voice again, only a few hours since the last time he did.

As the winds dispersed, Godou and Erica found themselves standing on an unfamiliar road.

In front of them was an unusually thin Yuri and a silver-haired girl.

...[Heretic God] Athena

Godou recognized with but one glance that facing him was the Athena who had retrieved the Gorgoneion.

Chapter 7 - Heretic God Athena

Part 1

Although Godou's night vision wasn't bad, it was nowhere as clear as his daytime sight.

But Godou immediately noticed Yuri's unnatural countenance.

"Mariya-san, are you alright? What did Athena do to you?"

"It's not that she did anything to me..... when Athena retrieved the Gorgonieon, I was nearby, so I received some influence. Please be careful, Athena isn't the same as before....."

Yuri coughed nonstop.

Her coughing was really bad; it was worrisome just to watch.

Godou ran over and gently stroked her back, but it didn't seem to help at all.

"Ah, allow one to tell thee, the miko was nearby when one was reborn, thus she received much spirit of death from one. If left untreated, she will die, as thee didst."

Athena looked at Yuri like she had nothing to do with her as she spoke in an uncaring tone.

Her actions irritated Godou.

The opponent was a god.

Even though she looked human, but her mentality and ethics were completely different. Godou understood long ago not to use human values to compare with them.

".....Erica, can you heal this affliction?"

"No, I'm not that all-capable, use the [Sword]. With that, you should be able to cut Athena's curse."

After asking Erica who stood behind him, her answer made it completely clear.

Godou put his hands on Yuri's shoulders.

So thin.

Although Erica was also short and slim, she was a high-class knight who hid strength indiscernible to conventional senses.

But Yuri seemed like a girl that was every bit as frail as she appeared. Other than her abilities as a hime-miko, she was just a normal girl; yet to make her shoulder such a heavy burden, it was natural for him to be angry at himself and Athena.

"Kusanagi-san, what are you planning to do?"

Godou patted Yuri's shoulders to relieve the distress in her eyes a bit.

Imagining the flashing gold sword, he began to chant.

"Heed the power of my words, let justice reveal itself, under the strength and eloquence of this incantation, for strength is ever victorious, for strength is the answer to all things."

The spell words of the sword.

With a single swing of the golden sword, the divine power of Athena that invaded Yuri was severed. Now they no longer had to worry.

"Eh?"

The goddess who has been watching them with bored eyes suddenly frowned.

Godou stared at her pleasant appearance and firmly said:

"Oy, I'll confirm it one last time; if you can just leave obediently, I can let you go. How about it, do you plan to do so?"

"Speak not such disappointment, one just retrieved the ancient power of the trinity, accompany one in this game at least."

He didn't think that Athena would say something that a child in tantrum would.

Looking down upon humans to such extremes.

At this point Godou had already decided. 'Fine, then I shall keep you company.'

"O one does not understand, but thou seemest angry. How about this, Kusanagi Godou? Allow one to be pleased for once? One has surpassed thy once prior, this time we shall compete by martial strength."

After casually almost killing Yuri, now she was challenging him as though facing a toy.

To Athena, mortal lives were like the ants under her feet, whether they lived or died was none of her concern.

"Kusanagi-san....."

Taking note of Yuri's weak voice, Godou strengthened the hand that was holding her shoulders.

Because of him, she had gone through so much trouble. The debt he owed her, he would take it from Athena with interest.

"Relax and rest, Mariya-san, allow me to take care of that goddess."

"Alright..... sorry, I had underestimated Kusanagi-san. I had always thought that even though you were a godslayer, you were an unreliable and flippant person—"

"No, you're absolutely right, you aren't wrong at all."

"No."

With an emerging smile, Yuri shook her head.

It was the first time Godou saw her gentle smile.

Like the blooming cherry blossoms, it was a very lovable expression, and Godou's heart couldn't help but skip a beat.

"When I met danger, you really did rush here. Of course, this destructive god was also called here by you, but your willingness to come take care of the mess yourself, made me change my opinion of you..... really."

".....Saying it like that, it's not very convincing that your views changed any."

"Really? Then, I'll praise you with even nicer words later; but please use your full power now. Alright?"

Towards the gently smiling Yuri, Godou stood up.

Then he told Erica, who was behind him:

"I'll leave Mariya-san to you. On your honor, protect this girl well."

"Your wish is my command, my liege—finally putting aside that stubborn fake pacifism of yours."

Erica responded after realizing his thoughts.

As expected of the [Diavolo Rosso]; if Kusanagi Godou was the king of the chessboard, then she was either the unstoppable knight or the queen.

"Don't add 'fake' to it, I'm really a pacifist, but I'm not going to sit here quietly while one of my comrades gets hurt. I only want to defeat Athena right now and take back everything she owes Mariya-san."

"That's my Godou, and this is my blessing for your victory."

Suddenly, Erica walked up to him.

Taking Godou's face with both of her hands, she brought her lips to his; although it was short, it was a passionate and deep kiss.

—Knowledge about Athena flowed in.

Regarding the goddess of war and wisdom, he now grasped her connections with snakes, owls, and mother Earth. In this moment, the [Sword] that slept within Godou had reached full potential.

"I'll pray for your victory, so go defeat the Heretic God Athena!"

'Why do you suddenly do things like this!'

Although he wanted to complain, Godou's face unconsciously revealed a grim smile.

It really was the best gift he could wish for.

Now he could use one hundred percent of his full strength to fight Athena. After all, she claimed to be the strongest goddess across all of Europe, Africa, and the Middle-East!

The calm Godou yelled towards Athena:

"I accept your conditions! I will deport you from this country by force. Once you lose to me, run and flee for your life!"

"Very good! We shall see who is stronger, godslayer!"

Athena roared back in delight, then waved forth her arm.

Dozens of owls flew forth from the darkness in a flash.

Furthermore, dozens of snakes also slithered towards him.

As birds of prey, the owls were armed with sharp talons and beaks, and each snake was at least five, six meters long in size, obviously poisonous given their colorful scales.

—He had to change to a different dueling ground.

Quickly realizing this, Godou began to run to open his distance with Athena.

The faint smell of seawater.

The prominent buildings surrounding them.

Thanks to them, he roughly knew where he was.

On the map within his mind, he managed to find a good location and began to run towards it as his goal.

The hordes of snakes and birds that closely pursued him changed their direction as well, and even the goddess herself followed in her strolling pace.

"You did great, Mariya Yuri. Thanks to you, that idiot man would finally fight seriously."

Erica, who stayed behind, smiled lightly towards the girl wearing miko clothes.

She took off her red coat and put it around the other's shoulders .

But Yuri wasn't that calm as she stared at Erica with a disturbed expression.

"W-what did you just do? Such a shameful, dirty....."

The serene expression she showed to Godou suddenly switched to one of anger.

She complained indignantly over what just happened.

Unable to understand why Yuri was unhappy, Erica tilted her head.

"What's dirty?"

"Obviously that! that... ki... eh, when you bid goodbye to Kusanagi-san, you did something immoral, something that definitely shouldn't be done in front of others!"

"You meant that kiss? Well, I wanted to continue it a bit longer, but it couldn't be helped; there wasn't enough time, and I haven't seen Godou so serious for such a long time."

Erica mistook Yuri's intentions and gave an irrelevant response.

"Just watch, when Godou is like that, he won't care about what methods he uses. He'll use every idea to achieve victory; he'll definitely defeat Athena."

Unable to understand the angry Yuri, Erica continued to smile towards her.

In the end, when it came to physical ability, the basics still fell to running.

Running from the pursuit of the owl and snake corps, Godou's mind continued to plan.

Although he has experienced many times of crisis, but compared to the authorities of Verethragna, his most familiar weapons were his own two legs.

Whether it was fighting or escaping, there was no way he could start without running first.

Convinced of this, he continued to run every day even after he stopped playing baseball.

He didn't want to put it like this, but he also had no choice except to exercise diligently, since he kept getting mixed up in these troublesome incidents. Truthfully, if it wasn't for his daily workout, there was no way he could keep running this long.

—Even so.

He didn't have the superhuman footwork it took to escape from the owls that charged him from the air, as well as the snakes that moved in like lightning.

Not to mention that the enemy's numbers increased before he even noticed it.

It was unknown where the owls and snakes kept coming from, but their numbers had already risen above a hundred.

"All evil things fear me! Unjust beings of power cannot defeat me! —for I am strongest, able to break all barriers!"

As Godou chanted his spell words, a golden radiance flashed past.

Since it came to this, he just had to sever the heads from the bodies of Athena's horde of servants, forcing them to return to dust.

They shouldn't be normal creatures, so they didn't leave any remains.

"Heh..... thou didst hide a wonderful weapon, not only to slash but also to cleave—it must be a sword. Spell words of a sword, thou dost hath taste."

Athena's relaxed voice came from behind them.

So it seemed like she had immediately realized the difficulty posed by the sword.

"Then, one shall play such with thee—though one's power cannot be fully display in this concrete forest, it is more than enough to match such tricks, take this!"

"......What the!!"

Godou was aghast with shock as he suddenly turned around.

Under Athena's feet—

The once hard concrete pavement had formed a massive wave, with the goddess standing upon it; the crest of the wave was gradually become scythe-like.

The cold solidified material once mixed from sand and stone now stood high like a snake head peering down.

Just as he noticed it, the concrete snake had finished its construction after only a few dozen seconds.

Its length was around twenty, thirty meters.

The elegant, silver-haired Athena stood straight atop the snake head.

Was that also divine power, or did she simply have an unparalleled sense of balance? Even on such an unstable position, she continued to look gracefully down upon the ground.

"Rise, my talons. Crush the godslayer into paste!"

The snake head Athena stood on was significantly taller than even the viaduct of the Capital Expressway.

"Damn it! What a mess this is!"

The roads that had produced the giant serpent had been completely ravaged by Athena's divine power.

The concrete had been uprooted like water pumped from a river, leaving only a massive ditch behind.

To restore the road's ability to handle vehicles again would require untold amounts of time and money.

Godou grumbled as he continued to run.

Almost there.

They were almost at a completely uninhabited location.

There were still some apartments and hotels nearby, so if they were to fight here, he had to be careful not to trash the surroundings.

Once past Shiodome District, there was a dense forest of giant trees—although it wasn't a scene that belonged in a city, he could see green forests on his right-hand side.

That was Godou's destination.

—Hamarikyu Gardens[1H 1].

Since its park hours were long over, there would obviously be no one there. Within such a large park, even if he went all out against Athena, it still shouldn't affect anyone else.

Furthermore, the walls in this place were low in height.

Dexterous people could easily leap over the walls.

Climbing over the barricade that was used to block the road at the rear gate, Godou caught onto the low wall and successfully made his illegal entry.

He watched the gargantuan snake chasing after him from atop the wall.

The massive snake continued to close in, crushing vehicles parked by the roadside, electrical wire poles, and sidewalk fences.

After revealing his location, Godou went inside the park.

Part 2

Hamarikyu Gardens was on the edge of Tokyo Bay.

The water inside the gardens was drawn from the sea.

With Tsukiji District[1H 2] as neighbor, it also had a fish market and a produce market nearby.

Following the outer wall, Godou continued to run quickly within the park's dense woods.

He was surrounded by trees, some over a hundred years old, with the smell of earth and greenery all around him. But it was a man-made park after all, and after merely five minutes of running, he had already left the woods.

The pool was filled with seawater.

Godou had arrived at a very spacious plaza.

He quietly waited there for Athena's arrival.

He had already understood all the information about the goddess. But if he could defeat her with knowledge alone, then he wouldn't need to push himself so hard. More importantly, he needed to grasp his opponent's character and the surrounding environment.

To seize the opportunity for victory, then press forth to defeat the enemy.

When Godou still played baseball, he was hailed as a catcher with courageous leadership and daring, while at the plate he was known as a slugger who could calmly analyze the situation and correctly pick the timing to bat.

To carefully watch the enemy, adapting as opportunity calls. This was already habitual to him.

Victory or defeat all depended on one's ability to adapt and adjust.

No matter how thorough the battle plan, victory cannot be assured.

No matter how great the power, victory cannot be assured.

It wasn't the strong or righteous that would achieve victory, but the victorious that would be declared strong and righteous.

Maybe this belief was the greatest reason why Godou became MVP numerous times.

"Thy choice is this battlefield, a shabby park. Humans do love such insignificant ploys, those of this island verily so. One hath visited many nations, but rarely meet people who cover so much earth with stones, to deny the darkness to such extent."

Moving over the rocks, the snake and Athena finally caught up.

It presented itself after tearing through the walls, which fell like paper under its greater height, and crushing the trees under its body.

"Please take your critique of other civilizations somewhere else. If you like living a carefree life, hurry back to the depth of Europe's mountains. I like to read at night so I want light; to regularly supply vegetables we need pesticide. I don't have time to accompany your worshipfulness in being selfish."

"Such is the arrogance of man. To awake at dawn, to sleep at night, to be blessed by the earth for abundant harvest, to enjoy the luxury of life, at last to die by starvation and enter one's underworld gates. One does believe this to be best?"

"As expected of a goddess amongst goddesses..... worse than even Marie Antoinette."[1H 3]

Talk about preaching fallacy, Godou couldn't help but grumble.

But even that famous line 'If there's no bread, let them eat cake'[1H 4] has been adapted for creative use by descendants.....

"The banter stops here. To encounter means to fight. Let us compare the martial strength of one and thee."

Athena declared with her elegant voice.

With this as a signal, the giant concrete snake charged towards the far smaller Godou.

Seemed like it was preparing to crush him under that huge body.

Even as a godslayer, if he was crushed by something that heavy, it would be impossible to revive himself.

Godou hastily ran away.

If he didn't draw it soon to fight this, then he was going to die here. The golden sword—one which only the [Warrior] incarnation holds; a weapon capable of slaying gods.

"Snake—is the symbol of your strength, or one should say your nature."

Godou began to softly chant his spell words.

This was the sword, the godslaying sword of wisdom.

"You were always a goddess related to snakes. As well as owls—with deep ties to birds."

"Oh? Kusanagi Godou, thou hast investigated one's origin?"

"Only because I have need for it. Right now, I already have around eighty, ninety percent understanding of just what kind of god you are; to explain your key aspect, that would be the [Serpent]."

Nonstop flashing.

Points of golden light bloomed and surrounded Godou, flickering continuously like the stars in the sky.

"To speak of snakes implied Medusa, as Athena and Medusa were once the same goddess. These two goddesses of a foreign land—spreading from North Africa and into Greece."

Driven by Athena, the giant snake rolled up the lush grass and dirt around the area, then hurled towards Godou altogether.

The slithering snake seemed like a river flowing across the earth .

"Tracing back to source, you are the snake monster—no, the snake goddess. Furthermore, Athena's mother from Greek Mythology, the goddess of wisdom Metis, that goddess is you."

Just as Godou was about to be crushed, the giant snake halted its advance.

It didn't stop by itself.

Instead, the golden light that surrounded Godou blocked the body of the giant snake, then forced it back.

Any snake scale that touched the light was cut apart like it had run into a razor sharp edge.

"Such is the spell word of the sword!? The weapon just now!"

"You are not a goddess of Greece. Born of North Africa, worshiped as the earth goddess by all of the Mediterranean. With numerous names and appearances. Metis, Medusa, Neite, Anata, Atana, Atona, Asherat..... they are all copies of she who calls herself Athena, your sisters in other terms."

Finally, Godou pulled out the [Sword] in full.

At the moment of unsheathing, a thread of light flashed out from the sword, severing Athena's giant concrete snake in two within a blink.

The gravel and sand that had made up half the snake all fell to the ground with a thunderous sound.

Athena's light body slowly descended.

"How distasteful, Kusanagi Godou! Thou darest threaten one with [Sword]! Dost not make one remember such forbidden pasts!"

Contrary to her perfect landing, Athena's countenance was one of great anger.

Verethragna's tenth incarnation, the [Warrior].

The fearsome might of this incarnation, the only one capable of using [Sword], was finally revealed to Athena.

"You, plus the predecessor of Isis of Egypt and Ishtar of Babylon , are all descendants of the mother goddess. You are not merely the goddess of earth, but also the dark god of the netherworld, as well as the goddess of heavenly wisdom."[1H 5]

Every sentence Godou spoke became spell-words, which soon dissolved into the golden radiance.

The light formed into a sharp blade, one capable of cutting the goddess.

Due to her intense anger, Athena's beauty no longer showed the carefree demeanor she once had.

"Ever accompanied by three personalities, so became the goddess of trinity—this is Athena's character. The war god's character is but an extension added over the changing eras, managing death of the underworld from the greatest disasters, connecting with war to become a god of conflict, all perfectly reasonable."

"Thou art too garrulous!"

Arrows and a longbow suddenly appeared within Athena's hands.

Pulling the bowstring tight, she released the arrow. As expected of a war god, the arrow shot straight for Godou's forehead.

But with a flash of the [Sword], the arrow was parried.

"Then, the key to your rebirth as trinity is the [Serpent]!"

"Speakest no more! One's past shall not be tarnished by youths as thee!"

This time, four arrows appeared in Athena's right hand.

Readying all four on the longbow, she simultaneously shot them out.

The seemingly odd but extremely powerful archery.

Yet these arrows were all deflected by the [Sword], scattering across the ground.

"Though [Cows], [Sheep], and [Pigs] have all symbolized the harvest grounds. In truth, you are also the cow incarnated earth goddess—except your character is the [Serpent]; that, is the most ancient key of Athena."

Even now, Godou continued to chant as infinite light emanated from him.

Once the traits of the opposing god were fully realized by him, the [Warrior] incarnation would unravel its true strength.

Transforming spell-words into a golden radiance, the power of the [Sword] which can cut the flesh of gods and their divine powers.

This was his greatest trump card for attack and defense.

"In the end, you are not only the goddess who holds the grace of earth but also the birth of life, growth, maturity, aging, finally death, the same as the four seasons. To take birth and grow in spring, to relish in summer, to harvest in autumn, to wither in winter."

Athena grew anxious from this and initiated her stance, swinging forth her held blade.

Despite being injured by the [Sword]'s radiance, she continued to bravely close the distance.

And her strong and sharp cleave.....

Was easily evaded by Godou.

Before he realized it, he had already seen through the god's movements; this was also a power of the [Warrior] form.

"Yet the people of the ancient world did not all receive the blessing of the earth. Due to natural disasters and other unusual phenomenons, more than half of the harvest would be lost—thus

the mother goddess gave not only blessings, but also plundered lives during wintertime and brought disasters during ill moods as a harmful deity. Without this, it wouldn't make sense."

Godou grasped the [Sword] in hand and swung towards Athena.

The light flashed once, twice, thrice, and continued.

"O....."

To evade the cutting spell-words, Athena was forced to step back.

"Thus it was the [Serpent], through several shedding of skins, cycling nonstop between hibernation and awakening, which became the creature representing the cycle of death and rebirth, of the revolving seasons. Compared to the [Cow] of harvest and compassion, it was the snake, with both the grace of life and scourge of death, that was truly worthy of a god."

To people of ancient times, it was extremely rare to find a creature with both the eccentricity and the mysteriousness of the snake.

Casting aside its outer appearance through continued shedding of its skin, hibernating for prolonged periods during the winter, followed by awakening during spring as though reviving from death.

Easily bridging the gap between winter and spring, it was truly an immortal god.

Winter—the god that brought death, but also the god of the wilderness and the underworld.

Such was the relation between Athena and the [Serpent], as well as the reason why she was both the goddess of earth and the netherworld.

Yet the netherworld imagined by the ancients always laid underneath the dark ground.

A winter world enshrouded by darkness.

Similarly, a time dominated by darkness—nighttime, was feared to be another part of the underworld, thus Athena was also the goddess of darkness.

"Heed the power of my words, let justice reveal itself! For this incantation is powerful and eloquent. The sword of wisdom that calls victory —Athena, how do you feel now? This sword is specially made to eliminate you. Its use will guarantee my victory over you."

Godou chanted the spell-words as he circled around.

Having revealed his final trump card to her, just how will Athena counter?

The overwhelming situation has returned to a balanced state. But with just their own strengths, the goddess still held the advantage; if the fierce fighting continued, she would regain the opportunity to retaliate.

"Kusanagi Godou..... one hath underestimated thee."

Athena said calmly and seriously.

As expected of the goddess of wisdom, she recovered her composure so quickly.

That couldn't be helped. There was no easy victory when fighting against a god.

"Though thou art young, immature, but still a devil king, and one who usurped power from us gods—from spell-words just spoken, one hath understood."

Athena stared sharply at Godou.

"Verethragna! The god thee killed is Verethragna! A god of conquest, closely tied with my friend Heracles and Indra[1H 6] of the far east. In servitude to a new divine king, the [Defiant God][1H 7] that struck down the ancient gods with his spear."

Godou suddenly shivered.

If the goddess began to stop underestimating him, then she would be a truly fearsome opponent.

.....But could that be true? Could she really fight seriously with a puny human? That detail would determine victory or defeat.

"That war god was the crusader of the ancient gods. If thee may kill Verethragna, then usage of the godslaying sword is expected..... yet can such be all?"

Athena smiled thinly as she gazed towards Godou with her sharp sight.

"Verethragna is not only the god of victory, but also the guardian of populace and kingship, the personal guard of the Persian God Mithra[1H 8]. Mithra is the incarnation of the sun, thus Verethragna is linked to the sun."

She saw through him.

Athena already realized the last card Godou kept.

Was this a power of the goddess of wisdom? To instantly discern even the traits of foreign gods, that had to be cheating! This was going to get problematic.

"Though one knows not of how many powers of Verethragna thee commandest, but thou should hast an Authority of the sun. To disperse one's darkness, the most capable shall be sunlight."

Both of Athena's eyes narrowed.

Both eyes were pitch black as though filled by darkness. They seemed to cover over everything within her vision, coldly seeing through all of Godou.

.....Mystic eyes?

"Such a tarnished and fearsome [Sword], but thy use is too blatant. Seekest to anger one and findest weakness during opportunity? One hath already seen through thy ploy."

Petrify.

Petrify. Petrify. Petrify. Petrify. Petrify. Petrify. Petrify.

Everything would gradually petrify, as long as it entered Athena's sight.

The ground they stood on changed into stone. The grass that swayed in the breeze and the beautiful flowers petals also changed into stone.

The lush trees also petrified to stone, the pool full of seawater became stone as well.

Athena was now using Medusa's mystic eyes, capable of petrifying all that it sees.

"Temporary deaths, stone coffin—such was also the ancient mother's power..... O, as expected of a godslayer, thee managest to actually survive. Spell-words must really be directly poured into thy body, truly troublesome."

Godou's legs, from his feet to his knees, have already been completely petrified.

But everything around him had already changed to stone, so his situation was good by comparison.

Athena probably wanted to convert everything within her sight to stone. To use such a power, even transforming all of Tokyo into a stone city was a piece of cake.

Godou felt fear.

Unless he stopped this goddess, there would definitely be a tragic catastrophe.

"The mystic eyes of the [Serpent] goddess Medusa, that is the best proof of your close relationship with [Birds]."

Godou infused the [Sword] with new spell-words, accelerating the power of the Authority to cleanse petrification.

The golden sword began to dance wildly.

Wherever the light struck, the petrified objects would throw off the curse, returning to their original appearance.

"The three Gorgon Sisters, including Medusa, had not just snake hair but also golden wings on their backs. The second sister Eurayle's name meant 'far-roaming flyer', while the youngest sister Medusa was the mother of the winged Pegasus.[1H 9]

The portrait of Medusa had dispersed throughout the Mediterranean.

In this portrait, the goddess held snakes with both hands, while a bird perched atop the head, clearly representing the link between snakes and birds.

"Linking you and birds were the earth and the underworld—you are a god who dominated over two worlds, while birds had the magical power to fly between the current world and the outer realms. Our ancestors have believed in this since long ago in ancient times. The souls of the dead will become birds who fly off into the skies, or guided by the birds into the netherworld.

Godou's petrified legs changed back to their soft flesh.

The circulation of blood was also returned.

"To travel between the earth and the underworld, it was natural for Athena and the bird to become one. Your trait is [Serpent]—but also [Winged Serpent]!"

"Thou seekest to injure and disgrace one, even hoping to make one lose composure. One will not be tempted by such!"

Every time Godou used the [Sword], Athena's mystic sight would grow stronger.

The petrified ground was returned to normal by the sword's golden radiance, then turned back into stone by the pitch black mystic eyes.

As the two confronted one another, their surroundings had already repeated the cycle several times, petrifying into gray stones before returning to the green earth.

"Originally you were a winged snake; before becoming a member of the Pantheon, you were the goddess of life and death worshiped by the ancients. After the winged snake was desecrated by the ages, the changing attitude would become the Heretic God Athena."

"Shut your mouth! Such ploys are meaningless!"

Although no weapons met one another, the battle was growing fiercer and fiercer.

But Godou could only stop his words as it was very hard to discover Athena's weakness. If they kept up such a battle of attrition, the tremendous divine powers of the goddess would surely gain the advantage.

Godou had originally hoped to decide the match with a counterattack.

When confronting a stronger opponent, one should allow the enemy to attack, exhaust them, then counterattack once they reveal their weakness. He had saved a trump card for such a decisive moment.

With the spell-words of the [Sword], he could unravel an iron-wall-like defense, granting ample odds of victory.

However, Athena had realized his plan. Therefore she used her mystic eyes to pin Godou down.

—Can't be helped. Nothing ventured, nothing gained.

Godou took a deep breath, preparing to expend the power of the [Sword].

"Dominion of the earth and the underworld, goddess of snakes who commands the wisdom of the heavens, doubtlessly the greatest existence among gods. Second to none, a god among gods, mandate of the greatest authority, Queen of the Pantheon."

The [Warrior] using the offensive and defensive [Sword] is the most powerful incarnation for battling gods.

But, its limitations were extremely severe.

The spell-words of the [Sword] may not be used indefinitely. The longer it is used, the duller the sword would become, until it was reduced to a blunt blade; this was no different from reality.

And just as any authority of Verethragna, an incarnation cannot be used continuously.

Without a day for recovery, use of the same incarnation again was impossible; as long as this condition stood, Godou could not rely on brute force to overpower the enemy.

"Once, you were a woman who held dominance over the ancient command, commanding the humans in the name of the gods, thus the leader of the gods was also the goddess—goddess of the winged snake. But you were overthrown from the highest throne by the martial forces of rebellious men, ending the matriarchy society."

Godou chanted, to forge and refine the strongest [Sword].

To expend all spell-words here, to inflict critical wounds upon Athena's divine power.

To pin her down and establish the way for victory.

Even the most detailed of battle plans could be disrupted by situational conditions, therefore the focus must be on responding to changing circumstances.

"The era of the Queen had ended; the era of the King had begun . The supreme power and wisdom of the motherly matriarch changed to that of the strict patriarch; from Zeus, the kings of gods were born."

Currently in front of his own eyes stood the former queen goddess of the Mediterranean.

Right, the former queen.

An overthrown queen forced to obey.

These spell-words that exposed Athena's past were also the sharpest sword to be used against her.

"The most ancient Athena was divided, degrading to the king of god's wife, sister, or daughter, losing all former glory; mythology was altered as such."

"......Shut up."

Athena's mutter was overflowing with silent rage.

"Athena became the king's daughter. Metis was disgraced and robbed of her wisdom. Medusa was even degraded into a monster. Furthermore, Hera and Aphrodite of Greek Mythology[1H 10] were also defeated mother goddesses, goddesses who once commanded life and death similar to you."

"Thou art told to shut up! Such spell-words are filthy beyond comparison!"

Athena was angry.

That was a good sign, but she still hadn't lost her composure, so he should follow the plan and attack her once.

"The defeated mother goddess, portrayed in mythology as the winged snake, the winged serpent—which was also the dragon. The evil dragons that stood in countless legends and myths, defeated by heroes and gods alike, were the final form of the defeated and trampled mother goddess!"

They were not prosecuted because they were evil monsters.

But because the victors demanded legitimacy, they discredited the defeated as evil monsters, then spread the tales of themselves vanquishing evil.

Due to this, the winged snake fell from a sacred beast and became a monster; the traits of the mother goddess were fundamentally denied. Thus this spell-word would become the mighty [Sword], capable of rending even Athena.

Golden radiance gathered in Godou's right hand.

Godou compressed the light into a longsword; with a brilliant glow spreading from him, he advanced towards Athena.

Readied to stop this sword was Athena's pitch black scythe.

A scythe of the death god that absorbed all light into its razor darkness.

Between the sword of light and the scythe of darkness, Godou and Athena finally clashed with ferocity.

Part 3

The golden sword clashed with the pitch-black scythe.

At the same time, the darkness continued to spread from Athena.

—Cold.

The temperature dropped as the darkness expanded.

Frost that felt like it cut through skin, as though winter had suddenly arrived.

"One shall not be struck by thee. One may be immortal, but cannot endure thy attacks that sever the source of divinity, thus one must defeat thee with forbidden darkness!"

Athena injected her power into the wrist that held the pitch-black scythe.

To fully repulse the golden sword, she was also expending her full power.

Before he realized it, the spreading darkness had covered the entire sky, extinguishing the light from the moon and the stars, and the entire surrounding was plunged into a chaotic darkness.

Other than the golden sword, not a single ray of light could pierce this darkness.

Despite this, Godou's eyes could still see perfectly through this abyssal darkness—he was really surprised.

The flowers around him withered within an instant.

The trees also lost their verdancy.

Greenery of all sizes began to wither one after another. Fruits turned to dust in moments. Branches also withered, shrinking until they looked like dry sticks.

Even the sound of insects vanished from the night.

—This was [Death].

Wielding the divine power that commanded death and demise, Athena injected her most dangerous powers into her scythe.

"One summons the winter, master of life and death, emissary of the icy netherworld, the shrewdly procuring queen. One commands. Kusanagi Godou, become the dead king, decompose into a corpse!"

Athena said as she drove back the golden sword with her scythe .

Her spell-words entered through Godou's ears and began to invade his body, which slowly grew cold.

—Is this a joke?

I can't be defeated here!

Maintaining his stance to counter the scythe, Godou tried to imagine the next scene.

He had planned to strike Athena down, but was blocked by her black scythe, yet the black scythe was also a part of Athena. To put it that way, could the [Sword] still cut everything?

This was one created to be only effective against Athena—a [Sword] that could defeat and surely kill Athena!

Cut.

Godou cut through both the black scythe and Athena at once.

The divine power that composed the goddess transferred the feelings over directly through the edge of the spell-words.

Earth, darkness, wisdom, snakes, birds, cows, queen, wife, fearsome woman, reborn woman, immortality—

Godou cleaved down with all his might towards everything she had.

At the same time, Godou was also inflicted by the [Death] spell-words.

He wasn't sure how long he lost consciousness.

Either several seconds, or several minutes, but by the time Godou realized, both he and Athena laid on the ground.

Godou pressed all his strength into his limbs, struggling desperately to stand back up.

Although they both fell at once, Athena wouldn't be defeated so easily; as the one who attacked her, he knew that better than anyone.

Then, Athena slowly rose back up.

Not a trace of a wound remained on her body, but the damage inflicted within her shouldn't recover as quickly.

"As expected, winning isn't so easy, but it would have been great if I had just won like that."

"Nonsense. To call one the snake goddess hath thee; no matter how wounded, neither snakes nor woman will die. Even if dead, they shall be reborn."

Snakes who shed skin to be reborn. Women who wouldn't die even with profound menstrual blood loss.

Both were representations of immortality.

But even though her words sounded fine, Athena's countenance grew very pale.

Yet at the same time, Godou had also lost much vitality due to the words of death. Though there were no injuries, he felt that his life force had been significantly reduced.

The result was that they both continued to confront one another in critical status.

"With this, thy [Sword] can be used no more; one is certain of this."

This troublesome fact was exposed by Athena.

She wasn't wrong. The golden [Sword] had already disappeared after expending its full power.

Godou no longer had any weapon capable of both attack and defense.

"In other words, thou now wishest to use the power of the sun... ... amongst the incarnations of Verethragna, the one closest in origin to the sun was the [Stallion]."

His own combat power already grasped by his opponent; the goddess of wisdom was truly a difficult opponent to fight. Godou couldn't help but want to sigh.

But he didn't even have time for that.

Athena pressed in silently, striking once again with her black scythe.

Godou barely managed to evade.

Followed by a second swing.

Cutting through the skin of his shoulders.

A third attack.

His ankles were almost severed.

Despite losing the power of the sword, he was still in the [Warrior] incarnation; it had kept some power, and was able to grasp Athena's intentions, as well as predict her next course of action.

Therefore he could at least evade the fatal strikes.

—But if he kept defending, he would eventually be defeated.

He could not cope with her offensive pressure; therefore she need not bother with defense, since there was no worry of the opponent retaliating. Then, to desperately attack the opponent, forcing him into catastrophe was enough.

The scythe cleaved, slashed, and attacked relentlessly.

Evade. Duck. Dodge.

Against Athena's endless attacks, Godou could only continue to evade.

"What's wrong, Kusanagi Godou. Why dost thee not use the power of the [Stallion]? Is it not the only weapon capable of defeating one?"

Athena mocked with a voice filled with ridicule.

After pointing things out so clearly, why would I use that to fight you? You must have readied countermeasures already.

Godou cursed in his mind as he desperately sought for a way to victory.

If he continued his melee fight against Athena, there wouldn't be even a chance of winning.

Godou completely understood this point.

If it were baseball or indoor soccer, maybe there were still some chances of winning. But Kusanagi Godou didn't have a trace of martial background; there was no way he could defeat her through strength alone.

At this time, he really wished that reliable partner of his could appear right now to act as his shield.

She would be wielding her lion-like magic sword, wearing a red-and-black outfit, and storm in with grandeur.

But she wasn't here right now.

With such a performance opportunity, how could such an egotistical person not appear?

Could it be that she couldn't find him and Athena? No, she wasn't that stupid. Godou only wished that the reason why she didn't appear was the reason he thought of.

.....As Godou still pondered, Athena's scythe swung in right before his eyes.

Godou hastily jumped back and managed to protect his vitals.

But he couldn't completely evade it.

His chest was struck, spraying blood into the air; although it wasn't a fatal injury, the wound was still very deep.

—Godou was immediately convinced of one thing.

He was already in such a crisis, yet she still didn't come out to help.

In other words, his partner thought of the same thing as him and was waiting for an opportunity to attack. As long as he endured through this, there would be a chance to win.....!

"Surprising thou managest to evade! Feebly clinging to life is an ugly sight, Kusanagi Godou!"

The unstopping scythe assault forced Godou to dodge by rolling on the ground.

His entire body was covered with wounds.

Despite this, he still managed to guard his vitals.

With his entire body stained by blood and soil, he rolled along the ground; although it looked shameful, it was enough as long as it kept him from dying.

Godou finally stopped fleeing.

He stood up on trembling legs.

Convinced of his beliefs, Godou decided to gamble on it: Erica would definitely take some action that he could look forward to!

"Just as you said, I still have the incarnation that represented the sun."

Godou said as he pointed towards the eastern skies.

He imagined a white stallion under the brilliance of the sun, its majestic body glowing with pure white light.

"For victory, come before me! Immortal sun, please grant me the shining steed. The divine horse of glory, bringing forth the light wheel that symbolizes the lord!"

The third incarnation of Verethragna, the [White Stallion].

Since ancient times, the [Stallion] kept a close relationship with the sun god.

The sun god that roamed from east to west atop a chariot—this was a common description passed down in numerous civilizations . The Orient, India, Scandinavia, China, and Babylon were no exceptions.

Apollo[1H 11] of Greece was also like this.

Similar to him was the Persian god of light Mithra, mythologies spread far and wide by the people.

For Verethragna's white stallion incarnation that once served Mithra, even carrying the sun was natural!

"O—it came indeed, that annoying horse."

Athena muttered towards the east.

That was right. Even though the darkness had blocked out all light, the eastern skies began to burn.

The sun was rising.

The dawning light dyed the eastern skies red.

It was obviously still midnight, five hours short of sunrise.

But the current skies grew very bright.

This was the incarnation of the [White Stallion], able to summon the power of the sun.

"Honestly, this incarnation is the hardest to use, but you've gone too far this time, so I managed to call it—because this in an incarnation that can only be used against a [Sinner who inflicted suffering upon the people]."

The Athena who created the dark world managed to satisfy this condition.

.....To use himself as the target, he always felt that the summoning would succeed. But this time, he should ignore that for once.

"See this, Athena! Let's see you taste the burning flames of the sun that vanquishes darkness!"

It was either an arrow of light or a spear of the sun god that descended from the skies.

An area spreading out dozens of meters around Athena was engulfed by the white light.

The holy fire that consumed sinners.

From the faraway eastern horizon, searing fire descended upon the ground.

"Wowowowowowowowowo!!"

Even those stronger than Athena could only cry out in anguish.

The sun god that replaced the underworld lords and his flames that expelled the night were the nemesis of this goddess.

But.....

"Hahahahaha! Dost not underestimate me, Kusanagi Godou! One hath made it perfectly clear. One hath long known thy final card! This is merely thy dying struggle."

Athena's surroundings were protected by a black enchantment.

An immensely powerful black barrier capable of severing all light.

It warded off the white flames. To prepare for this move, she had probably been gathering the divine power of darkness this entire time, and then waited for just the right time to use it.

If Athena protected herself with this until the fire burned out.....

Godou no longer had any incarnation capable of defeating the mother goddess of darkness, and once the flames died out, the [White Stallion] incarnation will lift, leaving Kusanagi Godou without a single authority.

But Godou shook his head.

"You're wrong; the one who underestimated others is *you*. Although you didn't underestimate me, but you did disregard—us humans."

A beam of light soared towards Godou from the other side of the darkness.

A beam of silver light.

The brilliant silver light—it was a cold light, like that of a sword's edge.

Cuore di Leone, the lion sword wielded by the girl that stood as Godou's partner.

The silver sword buried itself into the ground before Godou.

"When we fought, did you forget Erica's existence? It would be my loss if she wasn't here, but unfortunately, things didn't turn out that way."

Godou pulled out Cuore di Leone.

"Athena, you're far too foolish! That person's sword is specially forged. It contains the spell-words of despair, power even to defeat the gods. Normally, you can probably completely guard against it; but what will happen now, while you're defending against the sun with all your strength?"

The white flames were blocked by the barrier of darkness, unable to reach the pure body of the goddess.

But, Athena's countenance revealed her anxiety.

—If Erica had rushed in when Athena's scythe pushed Godou into a corner, Athena would naturally become aware of Cuore di Leone's presence, and would alter her actions as appropriate.

So despite watching Godou fall to desperate straits, Erica did not reveal herself to rescue him.

Because Godou realized Erica's plan, he gambled everything on this attempt.

Everything had been for this opportunity to let Cuore di Leone become his new trump card.

"Though, this cooperative fight wasn't preplanned. Thankfully, it worked; that girl Erica really knows how to calculate the best time to appear."

To toss over her beloved sword by guessing through this darkness, it was as expected of his partner.

Godou slowly approached Athena.

But if he attacked directly, he would be burnt himself.

Could he wait until the flames burned out?

Just as he thought over this, Cuore di Leone changed to the form of a javelin, probably because Erica had used her magic.

Of course, if he used a thrown attack, then he wouldn't need to close the distance.

Such caring support made Godou smile.

"This is the last hit; take this, Athena!"

He threw with all his strength, hurling the javelin out.

The Cuore di Leone that had taken javelin form dissolved into a silver meteor, piercing through Athena's chest.

Both the goddess and the silver javelin were immolated by the flames.

It didn't matter.

That sword was forged from indestructible steel. Even after melting in the fire, it would still resurrect like a phoenix.

"Kusanagi Godou, thou would sneak attack Defiant God Athena ! Damn thee, to own a title as hateful as devil king, one never guessed thou art so contemptible!"

"Stop blaming others! It's because you underestimated humanity that brought about your own demise!"

After been hit by the silver strike and falling to her knees, Athena was swallowed by the white flames.

Part 4

After several minutes, the white flames finally burned out, and the dawning light to the east also vanished.

The black night returned.

Yes, countless streetlights now illuminated the roads and streets , and light from the skyscrapers leaked out from the windows—everything had returned to that old semi-darkness.

Godou let go of the breath he held and stared into the night sky.

The half-moon and numerous stars twinkled in their light.

Even if he ignored his real feelings, he still couldn't claim Tokyo's night sky to be beautiful. Maybe tens of years had made him used to it, but the current feel wasn't bad either.

Nevertheless, the duel had ended.

First he should hurry home and take a shower, then sleep in relaxation. Taking care of the aftermath could wait for later.

"How was it Godou? That fight just now, I think receiving the Best Supporting Actress Award won't be an exaggeration."

Two girls walked into the once fierce battlefield.

One was a graceful blonde Italian, while the other was a Japanese who wore a miko outfit and looked very serious for some reason.

"If I could manage it, you can have however many awards you want, even an award ceremony is fine."

Godou replied as he sat down cross-legged on the wilted grass.

Even he was exhausted.

But, although his body should be injured all over and wracked by pain, he felt none of it, and even the serious wound on his chest had begun to heal. The recovery ability of a godslayer's body was still inhumanly high.

However.....

The catastrophe in this garden, he had caused half of it.

Just how many people could still recognize this as the Hamarikyu Gardens?

He wasn't sure when, but a massive crater had appeared on the ground.

The pine forest that remained since the Edo period, the numerous kinds of colorful flowers in the gardens, they were all ruined by the fight between him and Athena.

—Godou reflected deeply; he had gone too far again.

"So, how should we deal with this troublesome goddess? I think I should hurry and give her a final blow."

".....I second that. If we leave Athena like this, she will definitely become the source of more disaster one day, so we should naturally take preventative measures."

Erica suggested that as if she was taunting. Although Yuri looked like it was hard for her to express it, she nevertheless agreed.

The one they stared at was an Athena who looked like a little girl that sat on the ground after throwing a tantrum.

Maybe it was because she was burned by the flames of the [White Stallion], or maybe it was because she had expended too much divine power, but the mother goddess of darkness had shrunk, returning to the little girl look she had several hours ago.

She was truly a goddess with the divine trait of immortality. Even though she was just consumed by flames, she had already resurrected.

Of course, even Godou doubted the kind of attack just then could have completely killed her.

Although she was already deprived of her combat ability, she still had a fearsome vitality.

"Mariya-san, what you just spoke of, was that from your usual power? Through your intuition as a miko, or some similar ability?"

"No, just the thought of a normal person..... for something like this, even those who aren't miko would decide that way."

Yuri's reply relieved the weight on Godou's heart.

Even though he would arrive at the same conclusion with an ill prediction, Godou nevertheless felt relieved.

"Then, let's part here..... Athena, did you hear me? These people want to finish you off; you better hurry and leave this country."

"—Why would thee not finish one off? Slaying one would allow thee to usurp new powers, becomest an even more powerful godslayer; why would thee abandon such a good opportunity?"

After hearing the angry words of an unimpressed Athena, Godou couldn't help but reply with a frustrated and tired voice:

"I don't want these weird powers; the ones I already have are hard enough to deal with. Besides, how could I kill someone just because I beat them in a fight; I'm a civilized man you know."

"What?"

"I said, I'm not some god born during the Bronze or Iron Ages. It's the twenty-first century now, we don't have the habit of taking the life of another after winning a duel; don't push those ancient practices onto me."

After suppressing Erica and Yuri's desire to interject with his sight, Godou continued:

"Although I've always won competitions, I've never thought of killing the defeated opponent. If you won't accept that, then let's go with this: the saying goes 'the winner takes all, while the loser is obliged to obey the victor'..... can you accept that?"

Godou asked the shrunken Athena.

The goddess held her silence for a long time before she spoke at last:

".....Very well, the defeated should obey the orders of the victor. One knows not if we shall fight again, please take care of thyself; destiny willing, we shall meet again one day."

As Athena stood up, her silver hair swayed.

"The man who had defeated one, one shall always remember thy name—goodbye, Kusanagi Godou!"

Turning her back towards Godou and the group, Athena slowly departed.

Once she could no longer see Athena's small shadow, Erica intentionally sighed:

"Godou, you know, even if you defeat [Heretic Gods], your authorities won't increase if you don't take their lives?"

"Don't talk about killing so casually. Besides, even if we defeated those gods, they can resurrect like nothing had happened, how can we manage that so easily?"

Godou replied seriously, refuting the simple explanation his partner offered.

To those people, resurrection and rebirth was an everyday thing , so they were all immortal monsters. With such a blessing, he could go all out on the offensive without worrying about harming the opponent.

"Even though you say that, you never actually considered killing her right? Eh, I originally planned to help Godou quickly become independent, but if this keeps up; our future doesn't look very bright."

"I don't want to become any more of a monster, so don't make decisions for me with such an uncaring attitude..... right, is Mariya-san alright? She still looks really weak."

Godou asked about Yuri who was still staring at him with cold eyes.

When he left, she was still very gentle; why was she like a mine that was about to explode now?

She must not be feeling well. That was natural, since he had asked too much of her earlier.

Godou focused his sight on Yuri's countenance.

"My body really doesn't have any problems; I'm really grateful that Kusanagi-san was able to come save me just then."

A chilly tone.

Behind her polite words laid a cold expression.

.....Was she really angry? Then he should hurry and apologize; Godou continuously pondered over how he might defend himself. Although it was really shameful, but it was also a desperate matter of survival.

"Mariya-san, I'm really sorry for causing you so much trouble over this incident."

Godou bowed his head, realizing that even his waist had bent over.

What a disaster.

He wasn't sure if the gesture was enough. Would he still get scolded? He felt extremely uneasy about it. But Yuri didn't care about this at all; instead she began to berate him over something totally unexpected.

"No, I don't mind about that; it's because of Kusanagi-san that I met such extreme circumstances, but you also saved me, so I don't mind. Aside from that, there is something else I would like to ask you."

She revealed a dark smile just like several hours ago.

For it to reveal itself on Yuri's beautiful face yet again..... is really frightening.

"You are a true devil king—one who wields the authority of a real godslayer. But, these powers aren't for you to do whatever you want with. What do you think over this?"

"Uhh..... about this..... I think you're completely right."

"Then, why don't you watch your surroundings more! These gardens are ruined, and just how do you plan to take care of what happened over there?"

Yuri pointed sternly towards what was in front of them.

Godou glanced over the distant view and froze as he saw the tragic appearance in the night sky.

"Uhhh....."

The rooftops of several skyscrapers that reached into the heavens—

Two-thirds of those roofs had been sliced off, completely gone just like butter sticks that were cut by a knife.

Furthermore, the same happened to the elevated highways of the Capital Expressway.

Entire sections of the road were missing, just like icicles melted by a blowtorch, entire road portions had vanished without a sight.

The flames of the [White Stallion] that descended from the heavens must have caused this.

Because of the ultra-high temperature, the destroyed highway had the appearance of being melted near the edges; but this wasn't candy or cream or ice, but reinforced concrete.

"If it's like that, they should be able to just repair the melted sections right?"

"Who knows? Even if it can be, it'll be extremely difficult; just building construction scaffolding on top of those skyscrapers will be problematic enough."

Erica and Godou discussed as though they were casually chatting.

The former didn't see this as that serious of a problem, while the latter only chose this tone of talking to escape reality.

"Didn't I tell you this morning? You don't watch your surroundings enough; it hasn't even been a day yet and you still managed to do this."

As the only person present with common sense and moral integrity, Yuri coldly spoke out:

"And you're too low, too dirty, a complete pervert! For someone as indecent, lascivious, and imprudent as you to get the power of the devil king, I doubt this world will last much longer! I really misjudged you; sure, I thought at the time that you were a reliable and honest man, but I was being too naive. Talk about a complete disappointment."

"That, Mariya-san..... what low, indecent stuff; that doesn't seem right—"

Faced with this strangely agitated miko before him, Godou timidly responded.

Yet a razor-sharp glare cut him off.

"Really, Kusanagi-san, you've already forgotten what you were doing this quickly? Erica-san is Italian so I won't speak of it, but you're a Japanese man; how could you do something so low, so dirty, you should properly reflect just what shame is!"

"Huh? What do you mean? I, did I do something strange?"

"Did you seriously forget? Such a passionate—eh, that warm k-kiss, to actually do something so shameless!"

Now, Godou finally understand the reason why Yuri was so angry.

But he was also very troubled at the same time.

He wasn't good at explaining himself, and it would be very hard to clarify that it was a magic necessary to defeat Athena; it would be best to leave this to his more charismatic partner.

He begged Erica with his eyes, before he realized too late that this was like digging his own grave.

"Hehe, so Yuri didn't like that move. You really are late to mature..... At the beginning, Godou didn't feel much differently~~ "

What was she saying, 'at the beginning' was completely unnecessary!

"Since ancient times, wasn't a girl's kiss the best blessing for departing brave warriors? So I gave him strength this way. Godou was shy at first, but now, he couldn't even fight anymore unless I did this—it's really worrisome."

As he listened to Erica's explanation, Godou realized what utter despair tasted like.

Although it wasn't really a lie, but the malicious explanation completely twisted the facts and deliberately hid the truth.

"No, it's not like that, Mariya-san, it's actually....."

"If it's an excuse, then that won't be necessary; I already understand what's going on."

"By understand you mean—"

"Being tempted by Erica-san like that, Kusanagi-san must have been obedient every time. Right? I understand these things very well, since Kusanagi-san is also a man; as long as your lover coaxes you, you'd do her every bidding."

No explanation would be accepted.

Yuri smiled as she said these words, her expression beautiful yet frigid, accompanied by a cold emotionless expression.

"It's already late tonight, so I won't say any more, but please visit Nanao Shrine tomorrow. I won't need to mind the time then, so I'll properly educate you tomorrow—because I need to seriously teach you these things, so you better come alone. Definitely do not bring your lover there."

She gave him a heartless verdict with her steely tone.

Yielding to the overwhelming pressure, Godou couldn't help but agree involuntarily.

Epilogue

The battle with Athena took place during the night hours of Saturday morning.

Just like any normal company, Kusanagi Godou's Jounan Academy was also having an off day for today. It was originally going to be a restful and relaxing day, spent to recover his battle wounds—a leisure day like that.

But he had received a fierce scolding during the meeting between him and Mariya Yuri, to the point that both his mind and body felt bared to the bones.

Still he tried his best.

He was a righteous person who would do his best to peacefully resolve problems regardless of how difficult they were. Furthermore, what he did with Erica last night was indispensable for seizing the upper hand during his fight.

These were all sincerely explained to the best of his abilities.

But Yuri's response was still cold.

"So that's how, that's how it was. But from Kusanagi-san's point of view, as long as these efforts were displayed through the results ; even if you say this is another effort—"

It still hadn't finished.

"Is that how..... Kusanagi-san, is this excuse your idea? Or is it Erica's? Don't you feel it's rather ridiculous? Such unrealistic, convenient reasons should be moderated at least. Don't think that some nonsense excuse could fool me."

Not a single way out was offered.

The result was three continuous hours of cold, nonstop scolding ; he really learned his lesson in full this time.

Face to face with the beautiful yet harsh girl, alone with just the two of them, the entire time had felt like he was sitting on needles.. ....

Yuri ended up being cold the entire day, her words filled with barbs.

Despite this, Godou was very thankful that she cared for him over so many little details.

Sometimes when her words ended, she would ask Godou about his body's condition.

"Are you really..... alright? Though your body is really strong and different from usual people, but isn't there still a chance of something going wrong?..... it's hard to believe that you're already fully healed, just completely abnormal in every way, but such a weird thing only happens because you're an absurd person like that!"

She berated him with seeming anger.

Though it wasn't very frank, but Godou knew it was because she worried over him.

Even though she was in mortal peril yesterday, she still worried over others more than herself; she really was a kind and strong girl .

—So no matter how angry or how cold she was to him, it was all a sign of consideration to Godou.

Thinking this way, Godou bowed and apologized seriously even at the end of all the scolding.

Sometimes halfway through her speech, Yuri blushed and revealed a troubled impression: "this was a little too much....." fidgeting somewhat in embarrassment.

This happened on Saturday.

But on the next day, Sunday, something really bad happened again.

It happened when Godou held the newspaper as he watched the news on the living room television.

Edogawa, Koto, Central, and Port districts were engulfed by the darkness for around four hours.

Regarding this, the official rhetoric was a failure of the power supply and it was still under investigation—they held a press meeting that didn't clarify anything.

He confirmed the television and newspaper contents; every media was using this as its top headline.

But none of them reported in detail about how all lighting and ignition tools had failed to function.

It was obvious that someone was controlling the information.

History Compilation Committee.

Probably done by those people he heard about yesterday. No, definitely them.

But, just how did they manage this impossibly hard task? Just as Godou thought this over—

Just then, Shizuka opened the glass door and entered the living room.

For some reason, his little sister's eyes were filled with a ferocious murderous intent, and he felt really strange.

"What's wrong? In a bad mood?"

"Nothing—I just met Mariya-senpai during the tea ceremony club's activities."

What about it?

Godou continued to read the paper as he pretended to listen; not like it would be anything important.

"Senpai told me to tell onii-chan that she was too rude yesterday and was really apologetic."

Godou gave a perfunctory reply as he leisurely read the paper.

But the situation was turning in a completely unexpected direction.

"Onii-chan met senpai yesterday as well? I remember that you arranged to meet on Friday over the phone. Then you secretly met again yesterday..... I hope Onii-chan can spill everything for me now."

Shizuka suddenly said.

"Just what kind of relationship do you have with Mariya-senpai ? Isn't it abnormal to visit a girl two days in a row? Doesn't feel like a normal friendship..... so, Onii-chan, if your conscience is clear, will you swear to god? How about it? Do you dare?"

Stubborn, and too eager to find the source.

Plus the thoughts about Erica halfway through, things were getting worse and worse.

"Don't tell me, Onii-chan is playing both at once? I really guessed it! I always worried that someday you'd become the same

as grandpa. Just as I expected! Ever since you let go of the baseball you've always trained in, I had thought something was wrong. Maybe, you had let go of your sport activities because of these immoral habits. Onii-chan, I thought you were better than this!"

Little sis, why do you always speculate your brother to be so low?

Shizuka completely didn't understand Godou's rebuttal.

"Hmph! I can tell if you're lying or not just by watching your face. Onii-chan has that expression of concealing things that he doesn't dare explain."

She was spot on.

Although he didn't do anything regrettable, this wasn't something that he should explain to just anyone.

As a result, Godou fell into the predicament of having to avoid his sister.

Then on Monday morning.

Godou left his home. Although his physical wounds had healed , his emotional wounds had grown worse.

—His holidays must have gone wrong somewhere.

His heart felt strongly about this.

The baffling forced trip to Rome, not to mention even after the unrest caused by that duel, only the fierce scolding of the miko and his little sister followed. If this kept up for a second week, his body wouldn't be able to take it.

Weren't holidays supposed to be spent in happiness and peace, in a laid-back way?

The only lucky thing was that Erica stopped pestering him.

After going their separate ways during the night he fought Athena, Godou had called her numerous times.

Though he knew nothing good would come from meeting her, she did come here from Italy, so he should at least see her again before she leaves. Now that he thought about it, he also hadn't bid farewell to Anna yet.

But he couldn't get through to her cell phone, nor did he see her since.

Did she return already? No, that wouldn't be Erica's style.

Godou continued down his usual path to school with his worrisome mood.

His little sister, who normally went to school with him, wasn't here this morning. Because of her day duties, she had left early today.

Private Jounan Academy High School Section.

Freedom wasn't anything special; high school freshmen could be seen everywhere.

That was Kusanagi Godou's title in everyday life. Not godslayer , not a monster, and definitely not the seventh devil king.

"Come to think of it, that other night, didn't Anna-san say something strange.....?"

Godou suddenly remembered this and felt confused.

'If you come back safely, I'll personally make a delicious meal for you to eat'.....something like that.

She was technically on a business trip, where would she cook at ? Unless she meant the next time he goes to Italy.....

Godou thought as he continued walking forward.

A moment later, he completely understood the truth of the matter, as he noticed a girl's silhouette just a little further up ahead .

"Ciao, Godou. How is it? Does the uniform fit me? This is the first time I'm wearing a uniform, so it feels a bit strange."

A familiar voice greeted him in an intimate tone.

The beautiful girl before him wore a uniform he was used to seeing.

So that's how it is. At that time, Anna had already prepared for long-term living in Japan with her master; that was why Erica had brought a confidante who was good at Japanese.

"Oy, Erica, though I understand now, I still want to ask you; are you seriously planning to live in Japan? What's up with that getup ?"

"Just a uniform, isn't this the uniform of Godou's school? Although I don't get the point of everyone wearing the same thing, but it can't be helped, so I just have to accept it."

Deliberately swaying her blonde hair, Erica spun about to show off to Godou.

She wore a blazer of the Jounan Academy on her upper body.

The height of her waist was obviously different from Japanese girls, and because she wore the same uniform, her slender and long legs became very noticeable.

"Starting from today, I'll be studying abroad at Godou's school, and I've been moving all weekend. So I didn't notice your calls, sorry."

A smile like that of a devil's.

You're not sorry at all! Godou cursed silently.

Since it was Erica, this was definitely intentional, all for now—for the purpose of seeing Godou's shocked expression.

"You, don't you have a job as part of a secret association in Milan? Doesn't that job have heavy responsibilities? Can you really do something like this?"

"Of course. I told them I was leaving to take care of Godou, and everyone happily sent me off. You still don't understand your own position; for the purpose of maintaining good relationships with godslayers, even the highest ranking leaders would often take long trips."

Erica stepped towards Godou as though a predator moving towards its prey.

By the time he noticed, she had already grabbed his wrist.

"From now on, we'll be together every day; I'm in the same class as Godou after all. Alright, let's go."

With his hand pulled by Erica, the two of them continued walking towards school.

Since she was too strong, he couldn't get away at all.

He had no way of escaping—Godou eyed his surroundings before he felt despair settle in.

"Kusanagi-san, you really can't change your rotten habits; even after telling you so, you're back to doing such shameless things just a few days later!"

Even though, Godou didn't meet the qualifications to pray to god.

But right now, he couldn't help but curse the gods for tormenting him. Out of all times, it had to be now for Erica and Mariya Yuri to meet!

Of course, both Yuri and Erica wore the same Jounan Academy uniform.

It was the first time he saw this girl wearing their uniform; it was neat and fit her well, but then her scary expression drew nearer.

"Will you two step apart already? Just what is going on with this uniform, Erica-san? Don't tell me you really decided to stay in Japan?"

Yuri's eyes were as cold as ice as her gaze focused unerringly on them.

Within that icy gaze, flames of anger swirled and boiled.

"Yep, think about it: Two people love each other, but can't see one another unless they fly for twelve hours. That just doesn't make any sense. Besides, I can easily do my work over here, so isn't this great news?"

The uncaring Erica explained to the angry miko.

Work—this girl really plans to use my strength; this really impressed Godou. Such forwardness without any concealment was part of Erica's character, regardless of whether it was good or bad.

She was a witch who deviously planned her strategy before manipulating others.

Yet despite this, Godou never wanted to open the distance between them, most likely because of her forwardness.

But from the perspective of someone as serious as Yuri, Godou was definitely fascinated by feminine allure.

Yuri quickly turned to face Godou, who was analyzing the situation to escape reality.

"Last time, I purposefully told you to firmly reject Erica's temptations. I, I seriously hoped that you would be able to do so; but just what is happening now?"

"S-sorry, Mariya-san. But, I really didn't know either..... and even if I did, I doubt I could stop Erica."

"Seriously! You're still taking such an attitude. She acts a little spoiled and ends up leading you around by your nose, even though you just learned your lesson recently!"

Yuri was indignant.

Couldn't be helped, since Erica and Godou were the ones really responsible for Tokyo being engulfed by darkness, so they couldn't say anything in response.

"Let's stop the boring conversation and go to school. Even though we'll always be together from now on, it's best to extend

the honeymoon for as long as possible, so let's go enjoy ourselves, alright?"

"!? Kusanagi-san, don't be deceived by her temptation! —Fine, from today on, I'll temporarily stay with you two. I have to supervise and make sure neither of you do anything weird."

At that moment, Godou finally realized the dangerous situation he was in.

Query: to analyze, what kind of situation was he in?

Answer: to be dragged to school hand-in-hand by a blond beauty, while being the male closest to the one classified as the academy's most beautiful girl.

Yes, maybe it was because of Yuri's agitation, but she had already neared Godou's chest.

It looked like the blonde lover was trying to lure away a womanizing husband, while the wife tearfully tried to bring him back.....

He was being stared at painfully by the students of Jounan Academy, as though they were looking at a criminal.

—Godou shuddered.

If this continued, would he become a celebrity through notoriety!?

"Ah, right. Since I'm finally living in Japan, I should properly introduce myself to Godou's family and let them know we're in a relationship."

"Kusanagi-san, you can't do this! To have a relationship with this woman, just how do you plan on explaining yourself to Shizuka—your little sister and your family?"

"Not a problem. As long as I'm cordial, most normal people will gladly welcome me. I'm confident of this, so you don't need to worry."

"Do you plan to deceive even Kusanagi-san's family?"

"Don't say it in such a bad way; isn't it expected to establish a good relationship with the family of one's lover? Don't you think so Godou?"

"Kusanagi-san, don't just stand there, hurry up and stop Erica-san!"

Caught in between the two girls, Godou already lost any way of escaping.

He couldn't think of a way to escape this predicament no matter what. The only thing he could do now was to pray for some god to appear and rescue him.

—God, please give me a peaceful life.

Nothing extravagant, just that I don't want to meet any more gods or devils, and lead a peaceful everyday life. So please, god, grant my wish.

Kusanagi Godou's urgent wish had no chance of happening anytime soon.

Afterword

To all readers who finished this book.

Or maybe, those readers who sneakily began reading from the afterword.

I'm Takedzuki Jou, and this is our first meeting. This volume is the first of my novel scripts to be published.

This time, I'm very pleased to have Super Dash Bunko publish my book for me.

Please take care of me from now on.

The saying goes 'a gentleman should not dishonor the gods'. But, this book joined those other works that doesn't take things seriously and strictly. If possible, for those of you who disagree with me, I hope you can simply laugh it off instead of calling retribution upon me.

Especially the gods who might really reside in the heavens above.

I'm one of those who prays at the shrine on New Year's, who believe that faith is beneficial to the heart and isn't stingy when it comes to saisen[1] [1]; I'll be generous over saisen next year as well. So please forgive me.

Incidentally, the contents of this book are purely fictional.

So there is no relation whatsoever with existing people, organizations, religions, locations, and other social matters. Within this work, even if specific names and descriptions are used, that is still just coincidence and definitely do not refer to the real thing.

.....Really?

Please look at my eyes. Will a liar have such clear eyes? Eh? You can't see? Really?

Let's ignore this for now then and return to the novel's contents.

In the ancient times without copyrighting, story-writing was probably a very slow and ambitious project.

Mythologies are a product of those times.

The world has tons of similar tales, like the story of Izanagi who went into the underworld to meet his wife Izanami[11 2]; it was just like the legend of Orpheus[11 3] who entered the netherworld to rescue his wife.

Obviously, this isn't just some mere coincidence.

Stories that share the same origin changed their details, spreading through both Japan and Greece, reinterpreted by different views after many eras. This is a phenomenon caused by the spreading of cultural and migration of people.

.....Eh, to put it simply, 'easygoing plagiarism' is a common occurrence.

To regard foreign gods as evil spirits, demons, and monsters to be vanquished by one's own gods; such examples are plenty. It really is blasphemy.

--- But.

To seriously pursue such an issue would be like chasing an endless problem, so someone like me who isn't very serious thought up of this coarse method.

The result is the book, "Campione - godslayer!".

A story with a superpowered protagonist who fought endlessly with other high level bosses.

If you're enjoying the read, then that's great.

--- Hmm?

Erica seems like the main heroine?

Hahaha, how can that be--- the most images, strong, enticing, red, such things...

Just pretend you didn't see it.

Lastly, allow me to thank everyone who earnestly helped in the publishing of this book. I also apologize to the many friends who helped but didn't hear back from me in time while I was writing this.

Finally to all the readers here, you have my thanks.

April 2008, Takedzuki Jou.

Illustrator Afterword.

あとがき

■はじめまして！
挿絵を担当させていただきましたシコルスキーと申します。
あとがきに2Pも貰ってしまったので
個人的に描き足りなかった○○○（ネタバレになるので伏字）を描いて
キャラデザラフを添えてみました。
表紙イラストの二人も好きですが、シコルの一押しはこのキャラです。

と言ってもロリコンではありません、念のため！

ぶろぐやってます↓
http://www.sikorsky.sakura.ne.jp/

First time meeting!

I'm honored to illustrate Campione.

I'm the one given part of the two page afterword, and feels that my drawings aren't satisfactory enough (hiding my name in fear of spoilers).

A role was added to the original script.

Although I like those two on the cover, but I must recommend this character the most.

Just to prevent rumors, I'm really not a lolicon!

My Blog

Translator's Notes and References

Prologue

1. ↑ Epimetheus was the brother of Prometheus of Greek mythology. He is pictured as a foolish Titan. Some people also say that he is the one who accepted the gift of Pandora or that he had a child with Pandora.
2. ↑ Verethragna was a god of Zoroastrianism who symbolized victory. He could take 10 different forms.
3. ↑ Another god in Zoroastrianism. Verethragna and Čistā are his principal companions. Mithra is the Zoroastrian divinity (yazata) of covenant and oath. In addition to being the divinity of contracts, Mithra is also a judicial figure, an all-seeing protector of Truth, and the guardian of cattle, the harvest and of The Waters.
4. ↑ Zoroastrianism is a religion and philosophy based on the teachings of prophet Zoroaster (also known as Zarathustra, in Avestan) and was formerly among the world's largest religions. It was a religion in Persia, which is around the actual Iran.

Chapter 1

1. ↑ **House of Savoy**: *Casa Savoia* in Italian, and ruled in Italy before the Republicans overthrew royalty.
2. ↑ **Grand Master**: a typical title given to the head of a Knightly Order.
3. ↑ **Capital of Lilies**: the direct translation of Yuri no To.
4. ↑ **Copper Black Cross**: my translation of Shakudo Kurojuji.

5. ↑ **Baphomet**: a deity that the Knights Templar used to worship. As for who the Knights Templar are, they were a Crusader order endorsed in the 12th century by the Catholic Church. However, their last leader, Jacques de Molay, was burnt at stake by King Philippe IV le Bel of France; de Molay's curse is actually pretty well known. (This part is untrue: Baphomet was thought to be a pagan god, thus it would be Heresy for an ordained Crusader order to worship him. The myth of Knights Templar worshiping Baphomet was an accusation leveled against the Knights Templar, using relics they plundered as 'evidence', when Phillip IV of France sought to bring their downfall over numerous reasons , a foremost being debt evasion as he owed them a lot of money; historians also believe that 'Baphomet' was actually a typo of the Islam prophet Muhammad, which was often latinized to 'Mahomet'. - Aorii)
6. ↑ **Gorgoneion**: a pendant in Ancient Greece showing the Gorgon's head.
7. ↑ **Diavolo Rosso**: Dark Red Devil in Italian. I chose to use that term even if it's maybe not in the raws.
8. ↑ **Nuadha**: or Nuada Airgetlám, the first king of the Tuatha Dé Danann.

Chapter 2

1. ↑ **Hill near the famous Colosseum**: Also known as the Flavian Amphitheatre, it stands east of the Roman Forum. Used for gladiatorial fights, it also staged mock naval battles and a place to execute/crucify criminals. Do not confuse with the Circus Maximus.

2. ↑ **Seven Hills of Rome**: For the interested, they are the Aventine, Caelian, Capitoline, Esquiline, Palatine, Quirinal and Viminal.
3. ↑ **Emperor's Palace**: Quite a few of them, actually. Not just Augustus, but Tiberius and Domitian too.
4. ↑ **Augustus' Palace**: The text has Octavian, but he only built the palace after they crowned him king and gave him the name Augustus. So there.
5. ↑ **Mille Lingua**: 'A Thousand Languages' in Italian (well Latin, but 'Lingua' sound better than 'Lingue'). The text didn't have it in Italian but Kira0802 did, and it sounds better like this, I guess.
6. ↑ **Diavolo Rosso**: 'Dark Red Devil' in Italian. For explanation , see previous statement.
7. ↑ **Cuore di Leone**: 'The heart of the lion' in Italian. The text did give in the Italian this time.
8. ↑ **Hermes**: As someone noted before, the Roman equivalent should be Mercury (Hermes is the Greek name). But there is little difference in them, so I left it as is. For your information, Hermes was the messenger of the gods and the guide to the underworld. He is well known for his winged sandals, winged hat and staff, which let the user fly, like in the legend of Perseus and Medusa.
9. ↑ **Japanese Middle School**: That is, Years 7-10, or Secondary 1 to 4.
10. ↑ **Aethereal**: That is, those of the sky. It comes from the Germanic 'aesir', meaning air, heaven.
11. ↑ **Chthonic**: That is, those of the earth. It comes from the Greek 'cthos', meaning caves, underground.

12. ↑ **Eloi, Eloi, Lama Sabachthani!**: The words of Christ as he hung on the cross. Supposedly Hebrew (though it is meant to be Aramaic), it translates somewhat to 'My Lord, My Lord; Why hast thou forsaken me?' – which is exactly what she says now.
13. ↑ **David's Stones**: Stones, or more specifically slings, were one of the earliest ranged weapon developed. A thrown stone could shatter shields, pierce armour, penetrate flesh, and break bones and skulls. They appear even on Egyptian and Babylonian murals, a testament to their age. Some races were well known for the sling as a weapon. Cretans, Rhodians, Balearic Islanders, were all famous, and employed be many empires – Greek, Carthaginian, Roman – as mercenaries. So, don't underestimate it!"
14. ↑ **Yokotsuna Master**: The highest rank achievable in sumo wrestling
15. ↑ **Man-made Lake**: The lake was actually built by Nero, and stood in front of a building that Nero also built, the Domus Aurea (68 AD). [Which also means that the author was incorrect – it wasn't a ruin then.] It was quickly torn down by succeeding emperors, embarrassed about their family history . A mere eight years later (74 AD), Vespasian had the lake filled in, and began construction of the Colosseum.
16. ↑ **Castella Sforzesco**: The Sforza Castle (in English) is one the biggest citadels in Europe. It now houses several of Milan's museums and art collections.
17. ↑ **Cagliari**: Also one of the biggest ports in the Mediterranean sea.

18. ↑ **Piazza del Campo**: One of Europe's most beautiful medieval squares, it is known worldwide for it's beauty and architectural integrity.
19. ↑ **Grimoire**: Coming from the French, Basically a book on magic, a spellbook.
20. ↑ **Gorgon Medusa**: The fact is, there are actually three Gorgons in Greek mythology: Stheno, Euryale and Medusa. They were originally considered winged, tusked and fanged women, but later Greek tradition has them all as beautiful women. The first two were immortal, and hence Perseus killed the last one, Medusa, because she was the only one possible to be killed.
21. ↑ **Perseus**: This is incorrect. Although anyone with a better understanding of Greek mythology is free to correct me here. (No this is pretty much right; the hero Perseus did slay Medusa, and although she was the most powerful of the Gorgon sisters she was the only mortal; however, Perseus killed her not because of that, but because Athena demanded it so after being angered when Medusa slept with Poseidon in one of her temples and thus desecrated it [Athena was known as 'Virgin Athena' after all] -- Aorii)
22. ↑ **Tripartite Goddesses**: The author is referring to Demeter, Persephone and Hecate, the three forms of a great mother goddess who may have been Rhea or Gaia.

Chapter 3

1. ↑ **Nanano Shrine**: 七; literally 'shrine of the seven heroes'.
2. ↑ **Ante-hall**: The technical term is 前, and should technically be called the pronaos, but Asian temple architecture is hard

to describe in western terms. It is the first, smaller hall (usually with statues or pictures of guardians of shrines and religion) before one enters the great hall itself.

3. ↑ **Kosode**, **Furisode**, **Hakama**: Look it up, the explanation's sort of long winded: Kosode, Furisode, Hakama
4. ↑ **Miko**: Miko are usually Japanese shrine maidens. However, in this story the term also refers to a type of magic-user, and not all of those magical miko are shrine-maidens. That is why we left the term as miko whenever it shows up.
5. ↑ **Hime-miko**: Japanese for princess-shrine maiden. It is the name of a group of a people and as with miko, we decided to leave it as it is for now.
6. ↑ **Rakshasa**: Wicked and unrighteous spirits that wreck havoc in the human world. Rakshasa
7. ↑ **Jinbocho**: Well known as Tokyo's centre for used-book stores and publishing houses.

Chapter 4

1. ↑ **Torii**: A traditional Japanese gate, marking the boundary between sacred and profane ground. This is probably the most well known sight in a Shinto shrine.
2. ↑ **Period Drama**: A specific type of soap opera set in the past , dramatizing family/state/etc. situations for audience titillation. Particular popular with the aged in Japan and China.
3. ↑ **Nero**: Nero Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus, last of the Julio-Claudians. Well known for killing his mother, suspected for the Great Fire of Rome, an altogether

unpleasant man who was known for cruelty, sadism, drunkenness and womanising.

4. ↑ **Dong Zhuo**: Politician and warlord of the Later Han Dynasty, he killed all those who opposed his rise to power, eventually deposing the emperor himself. He was most well-known for the cruel tortures which he subjected his victimes to. For example, soaking a clothed soldier in fat and setting fire to his foot, so he could watch their facial expressions.
5. ↑ **Oda Nobunaga**: The ultimate unifier of Japan after its Warring States Period, he killed his brother to take on the throne, and was noted for destroying anyone (buddhist monks, protesting villagers, smaller, subservient clients) who got in his way.
6. ↑ **Numidia**: That is, modern Algeria.
7. ↑ **Famous trick before the walls of Troy**: She of course refers to the Trojan horse, devised by Odysseus to breach the seven gated city of Troy – from the inside.
8. ↑ **The owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of dusk**: A very strange one to use here, especially if you know the context of it. It's a Hegelian quotation, which refers to the way in which we understand history. As he implies, our 'wisdom' – that is, the logic and progress of history – will only reveal itself at the end, the 'dusk' of any event which we are considering. But I guess author-san wanted to sound learned.

Chapter 5

1. ↑ **Etruscans**: ancient inhabitants of central-eastern Italy, they used to be masters of the Romans. Eventually, the Romans rebelled from them, but also took over many of their ancient customs, like the 'Roman' baths, their trinity of gods, augury, and of course, warfare. However, the use of infantry that fought in melee and also carried spears was NOT Etruscan; rather, it was Samnite. The Romans got their idea of the triarii from the Etruscan warriors, who in turn got theirs from the Greek hoplite phalanx. Ranged units, such as javelineers, slinger and archer were almost purely that. Light infantry did exist, but their spears were for melee combat. But hey, why spoil a good story, right?
2. ↑ **Javelin Combat**: anyone know what he's referring to here? (Unlikely to be true, while the Knights of Irish myth often hurled their spears, it was against mainstream knightly code during the Medieval Ages to strike down an opposing knight with a javelin. As champions of chivalry, it is doubtful any Knight of the Round Table would do this - Aorii)
3. ↑ **Metis**: the Titan of prudence and wisdom in Greek Mythology.
4. ↑ **Gaia and Uranus**: Gaia was the primordial Earth-goddess and mother of all things in Greece mythology; Uranus, father sky, was both her son and husband (<_<). Together they gave birth to the earliest Titans and many of the Greek Gods.
5. ↑ **Athena's Birth**: Zeus supposedly turned Metis into a fly and swallowed her, but Metis began to forge a helmet and armor for her unborn child, causing Zeus great pain from inside him. Eventually his son Hephaestus, god of artisans,

struck Zeus' head with an axe or hammer. Athena was born ' from' Zeus this way, fully grown, armed, and armored, while Zeus was none worse for the wear.

6. ↑ **Shiba Park**: a famous park in Tokyo, built around the Buddhist Great Temple San'en-zan Zōjō-ji
7. ↑ **Tsukishima**: an island formed of reclaimed land in Tokyo Bay

Chapter 6

1. ↑ **Plato**: Greek Classical-era philosopher attributed with laying the foundation to western philosophy and science.
2. ↑ **Timaeus**: one of Plato's dialogues, involving Socrates, Timaeus of Locri, Hermocrates, and Critias.
3. ↑ **Herodotus**: Greek Classical-Era historian, renowned as the 'Father of History'.
4. ↑ **Heracles**: also known as Hercules, son of Zeus and the greatest of Greek Heroes
5. ↑ **Ba'al**: actually a Semitic title meaning 'ruler' or 'god'; numerous deities (and cult gods) used this name, but they're probably referring to the Canaanite god Hadad here.
6. ↑ **Canaan**: ancient biblical region in the Levant; around the same area as present-day Isreal.
7. ↑ **Shield of Athena**: Athena had integrated the severed head of Medusa into the center of her shield, the Aegis
8. ↑ **El, Ogmios, Artemis**: El (or Il) is the suprme good of the canaanites, father of Baal and creator of everything, prototype of all of the creator gods of Levantine religions, including judaism ('l/el/il is also the word for "god" in semitic languages, found in titles such as the names of some

angels); Ogmios is the Celtic god of eloquence, who could bind others through words alone and supposedly looked like Hercules; Artemis is the Greek goddess of the hunt, wilderness, and childbirth.

9. ↑ **Ogoun, Tezcatlipoca**: Ogoun is the god of smithing, hunting, politics, and war of Yoruba (Nigeria) and Haitian beliefs; Tezcatlipoca is the Aztec central god of chaos, governship, temptation, beauty, war, and strife.
10. ↑ **Susanoo, Vishnu**: Susanoo is the Japanese Shintoism god of sea and storms; Vishnu is the supreme god of Vaishnavism branch of Hinduism.
11. ↑ **Hot Pot**: Japanese often have hotpots (Nabe) to celebrate the completion of projects or special events (why an Italian would do so, I have no idea!)
12. ↑ **Parthian & Sassanid Empire**: Persian Empires of the Middle East during 247BC-224AD (Parthia) and 224AD-651AD (Sassanid), centered around modern-Iran; both often came into contention with the Roman and later the Byzantine Empire.
13. ↑ **Zarathustra**: also known as Zoroaster, the founder of Zoroastrianism, which once dominated the Middle East as one of the world's greatest religions. It was later shunted aside and replaced by Islam.

Chapter 7

1. ↑ **Hamarikyu Gardens**: a public park located at the mouth of the Sumida river, surrounded by a seawater moat and built from what was once a Tokugawa family villa.

2. ↑ **Tsukiji District**: tsukiji literally means 'reclaimed land', and although multiple Japanese cities have such an area, none of them are as famous as Tokyo's.
3. ↑ **Marie Antoinette**: Queen of France executed during the French Revolution, known for her corrupt, selfish, and gaudy lifestyle with an inability to understand the common folk.
4. ↑ **Let them eat cake**: famous line supposedly said by Marie Antoinette in response to those who complained of having no bread to eat, although historians believe this to be a byproduct of dramatized journalism.
5. ↑ **Isis and Ishtar**: Isis is the Egyptian goddess of compassion, nature, and magic, often viewed as the ideal mother and wife , as well as a friend to the downtrodden, the sinners, and the slaves; Ishtar is the Assyrian and Babylonian goddess of fertility, war, love, and sex, known as a fickle lover who also unleashed the Bull of Heaven upon Gilgamesh for refusing her love in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*.
6. ↑ **Indra**: King of the gods and god of storms, rainfall, and war in Hindu mythology, and associated with Vajrapani, the chief protector of the Buddha.
7. ↑ **Defiant God**: as Heretic God, both written as 'Disobedient God' in raws, but since heretics never refer to themselves as heretics, Athena's use of 'Heretic' will be converted to ' Defiant'.
8. ↑ **Mithra**: the Zoroastrian god of covenant and oath, a god of judgment and all-seeing protector of truth, guardian of cattle, harvest, and water elements.

9. ↑ **Pegasus**: the winged horse; according to Greek Mythology, Medusa was impregnated by Poseidon and when the hero Perseus beheaded and killed her, Pegasus and Chrysaor, a golden-sworded giant, burst from her body.
10. ↑ **Hera, Aphrodite**: Hera was the sister of Zeus and goddess of women and marriage; Aphrodite was the Greek goddess of love, pleasure, and beauty.
11. ↑ **Apollo**: Greek god of the sun, truth and prophesy, healing and plague, and patron of the fine arts; son of Zeus and Leto, he is one of the most important and idealized deities of Greece.

Afterword

1. ↑ **Saisen**: money offered to kami or bodhisattvas in Japanese shrines, usually through a saisen box[1]; in Chinese raws this is translated to money for 'prayer oil sticks', which is how they donate to temples, but I figure saisen would work better since dear author is Japanese after all.
2. ↑ **Izanagi & Izanami**: the creation gods of Japanese mythology; when Izanami died from childbirth, Izanagi visited the underworld to bring her back, but she claimed to have already eaten food of the underworld and was thus one of the dead. Unwilling to let go, Izanagi turned his comb into a torch to see her (which she had warned again), but instead of his beautiful wife he sees a rotting body being decomposed by foul creatures. Horrified, Izanagi ran away, abandoning his wife and sealing her in the underworld. The

enraged Izanami vowed to kill 1,000 men per day, but Izanagi retorted that he would give life to 1,500 per day, and hence the cycle of life and death was born.

3. ↑ **Orpheus**: legendary Greek poet, musician, and prophet who entered the underworld to rescue his wife Eurydice.